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AN OLD MAID'S PARADISE

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ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

AUTHOR OF "BEYOND THE GATES" AND "THE GATES AJAR"



LondonCHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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AN OLD MAID'S PARADISE.

I.

IN PROSPECT.

"I WANT" - said Corona.

Tom and Susy looked up. Corona did not often say she wanted anything. Susy thought this natural. Was it not enough to live in the house with Tom? But Tom had never thought anything about it.

"I want" — began Corona again; and then she stopped. What did she want? Her thoughts were vagabonds. They roamed a great way from Tom and Susy at that moment. They were a lawless, disorganized, hungry horde.

"Nothing for tramps!" said Corona, severely. But she did not say it aloud.

She took up the grape-scissors thoughtfully; she showed a slight contraction between a pair of well-controlled, charitable gray eyes, and snipped the Malagas leisurely upon her plate, before she said, —

"I want a home."

Tom laid down his nut-pick and Susy the baby. It took quite a shock to make Susy put down the baby. Corona colored. Tom was her own brother; but Susy was the mother of her niece.

"Give her to me!" cried Corona, hurriedly. "She's putting up her lip. You've hurt her feelings. And oh! Susy, don't mind me a bit, and Tom, you've always done everything; but, Susy, the baby won't cry for me more than a day or two, and, Tom, you must see that to have a place of your own"—

"Get married;" said Tom.

"I can't afford to support a husband, till the panic is over."

"Write a book," said Susy. "It will divert your mind. You're morbid. The

baby has kept you awake too much this winter. I'll take her to-night."

"Experience with three poems, two Sunday-school books, one obituary, and one letter to 'The Transcript,'" said Corona, calmly, measuring off these articles in shag-barks on the table-cloth, "has not encouraged me to pursue a literary life. If there had not happened to be such a press of matter every time, it might have been different. The editors regretted it exceedingly, Susy; and the manuscripts are in the hair trunk in the inner attic."

"Go to college," suggested Tom. "There's Boston University."

"I am thirty-six years old," said Corona, sadly.

"Go into business, then," cried Tom, desperately. "I'll furnish half the capital. I always said you were the better business man of us two. Come!"

"Tom," replied Corona, faintly, "was it you who inherited father's sick-headaches? If I did not have one every week, however, perhaps"—

"I give it up," said Tom, after a pause.

"I think if I did not let you draw baby about so much," observed Susy, with a judicial expression; "and she is growing so cunning! And we meant to put something Eastlake into your room this spring. Did n't we, Tom? But we were going to wait for a surprise, till you got home from Aunt Anna Maria's. Besides, Coro, if you are not contented in your present way of life, you could make yourself very useful by showing a little more interest in the Widow's Mite, or the Reform Club, and the sewing-circle, you know"—

When matters got around to the sewing-circle, argument ceased to be a sane method of conducting conversation. Susy's mind was so constructed. Corona sighed. But Tom interrupted:

"There are depths of human nature, Sue, which even the sewing-circle will not fill. Let Coro alone. If she wants to go, go she shall. Why should n't she? We went ourselves. You did n't stay because your

mother wanted help in scouring the preserves."

"Scouring preserves?" began Susy. But Tom laughed and left.

From beyond the front door he heard Susy talking; but it was a mild, safe chatter, — something about marmalade. It was clear that her mind was temporarily diverted in a sweet direction.

Tom had that amount of profound respect for his wife which is involved in a wellassured and well-controlled conjugal affection of several years' hard use. Still, the sight of Susy giving advice to Corona was something which he never found himself able to witness with that gravity which his ideal of his wife demanded.

Coro slid after him. She wore slippers without heels. It was one of her "ways." Her footfall dropped at his side without noise, and he started when she touched him on the elbow.

"Co, what do you look like that for? I understand."

- "You don't mind, Tom, dear, a bit?"
- "Not a mind," said Tom. "Where will you build it, Coro? On Fifth Avenue, Pike's Peak, or out in my garden? I'll lease you a lot. Come!"
- "If you do understand," said Corona, hastily, "then there is no difficulty in the way. Nothing is hard in the world but hurting people's feelings."
- "Perhaps not," said Tom, "unless you count in starving, or death at the stake, or a codfish breakfast, or a few such things. But don't you bother, Co. Go ahead. I'll stand by you."
- "Tom," replied Corona, "I'd like to kiss you."

She did not often. At least, she did not often say so. Tom and Corona had never been of "the kissing kind." He took off his hat—he was in a hurry, too—and they kissed one another so gravely that Tom was quite embarrassed. But that was not till afterward, when he thought of it.

IN PLAN.

CORONA had five hundred dollars and some pluck to spare for her enterprise. She had also at her command a trifle for furnishing. But that seemed very small capital. Her friends at large discouraged her generously. Even Tom said he did n't know about that, and offered her three hundred more.

This manly offer she declined in a womanly manner.

"It is to be my house, thank you, Tom, dear. I can live in yours at home."

Susy said that never would allow for a closet for the bedding; and one lady, a neighbor, unmarried and past sixty, asked if Corona were sure it was proper.

"Proper?" said Coro, looking puzzled.

"Why, to live by yourself so. It is so — so unusual; so *outré*. And you're not even literary. A literary person can do anything."

"So can a lady," said Coro, shortly. The ancient neighbor had begun to say "I could n't;" but checked herself upon receiving this reply, and went away indefinitely offended. She forgave Corona, however, in the fulness of time, so far as to make her a red flannel pincushion, ornamented in a rectangular design with white porcelain buttons.

"So far as I can see," observed Corona, thoughtfully, "the first thing I shall need is a man."

"What did I tell you?" asked Tom.

"But I meant an architect, or — or a carpenter, or a plumber, or that kind of a man," said Corona, with gravity. She would n't give Tom the satisfaction of laughing at his poor joke.

Corona's architectural library was small. She found on the top shelf one book on the construction of chicken-roosts, a pamphlet in explanation of the kindergarten system, a cook-book that had belonged to her grandmother, and a treatise on crochet. There her domestic literature came to an end. She accordingly bought a book entitled "North American Homes;" then, having, in addition, begged or borrowed everything within two covers relating to architecture that was to be found in her immediate circle of acquaintance, she plunged into that unfamiliar science with hopeful zeal.

The result of her studies was a mixed one. It was necessary, it seemed, to construct the North American home in so many contradictory methods, or else fail forever of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that Corona felt herself to be laboring under a chronic aberration of mind. No sooner had she mastered the theory which required one to believe that a brick house was the only one which any person with a claim to average American (not to say North American) intelligence would ever for an instant

contemplate building, than she was gradually and gently convinced that the sole rational material was wood. As soon as she had resigned herself to wood, it was made perfectly clear to her that wood took fire, and that bricks were red, and that to build anything but a gray stone house was artistically false, economically untrue, and morally wrong.

Then, again, with roofs. Roofs, it seemed, must be flat, or else the builder; French, or you might as well go without; this, that, or the other, or die. Corona seemed to have entered a new world, like a person who is spending his vacation in the wrong place. She had never thought about roofs before, except in a gentle, abstract, and entirely uncontroversial manner, as A Roof. She found herself abashed at first by the fever of low curiosity into which her accumulated wisdom threw her. When she took her innocent morning walk abroad, how many eaves she saw! Her neighbors were ticketed off by an instinct of which, as soon as

it ceased to be controllable, she almost ceased (like other varieties of sinner at the same descent of moral surrender) to be ashamed. Thus,—

"Mrs. Jones, hipped. Mr. McGee, lean-to. Tom Sizlewort, French; slate; top-heavy. Mrs. Plating, gravel-and-tar. The Wigginses, leak like the Deluge." And so on.

When she had spent a fortnight in pursuing her studies in this faithful way, it occurred to Corona that the Architectural Manual, considered as a class, was not intimately attentive to the needs of persons of limited means. She had become very much interested in accounts of several houses, which ran somewhat in this manner:—

"Having selected your location, which must be perfectly airy, light, and clean; on top of a hill, yet without a toilsome ascent (which drives away visitors and offends the coachman), or else in the lowlands, where you are sure of a fresh mountain breeze every afternoon; not so near the city as to incur heavy taxes, yet with horse-cars pass-

ing the door once in ten minutes; not so far in the country as to be dependent upon the New England village snow-shovel, vet far enough to secure fresh milk and cream from your own cow three times a day; at least within five minutes' walk of steamcars, yet not so near as to be disturbed by the vicinity of the half-hour gravel trains which it is customary for most of our New England roads to run at night in the summer months; a location, above all, sufficiently dry to secure your children from pulmonary affections, while yet a sea-breeze at two o'clock in the afternoon is indispensable to comfort for at least a third of the Massachusetts year - having selected your location with care, proceed to build upon it, we will say, a modest house, of not more than twenty rooms, small barn, a well-curb, and a French roof. The house might be constructed in the Queen Anne style, and fitted out with Elizabethan furniture, at a very reasonable rate. The morning sun should fall into the four sides of the house;

the afternoon sun at least into three. This should be insisted upon, even if you dispense with the Chinese hen-house and the Fayal drain-pipe, which we recommend for this style of residence.

"Such a house can be built for not more than nineteen thousand dollars at the outside. Necessary improvements on the grounds can be deferred till the following year."

Or, again: "We will suppose that you are limited both in your price and in your choice of location; that your house must be as much as twenty miles out in the country, and in entire accordance with your means and style of living, which, we will say, are small and quiet. Purchase a lot two hundred by two hundred, near post-office, railway, telegraph, apothecary, doctor, butcher, baker, candlestick-maker, town-hall, and church. It is especially necessary to obtain these conditions in the country. Select quiet neighbors, since your lot is small. Avoid gossips and people who keep many

hens, because of their crowing if you keep a light burning all night, which in the country it is always safe to do, on account of burglars.

"You want, we will suppose, thirteen rooms and a gambrel roof. You will need two of the No. 1 Magee furnaces and a chaise-house. Your coachman should have a room finished off in the chaise-house, and an L should be devoted to the house-servants. The horse you can board at the hotel until by prudence and economy you have saved enough to build a mediæval barn. Until you can build a mediæval barn, your own good taste will prompt you to go without any. It will be necessary to provide gas and water all over the house, if you wish to retain your servants. You will require a finished stone wall all around your lot, to keep out cows and the lower circles of society. Your dog-kennels might be after the antique, and still leave room for a border of sunflowers and a few amateur vegetables. It is always necessary to keep two

large dogs in the country, on account of tramps. Also chains at each outside door and a brace of pistols. A Corinthian cupola would be in excellent taste, to finish off this house. If the house be of wood, a delicate salmon tint with green blinds will give a fine Doric effect. A small fountain playing through tin calla lilies in the front yard, a statuette or so, and an Ionic gate will complete what you will find to be a most favorable and harmonious impression.

"For such a house we would recommend that the kitchen chairs be not less than two hundred years old; while the other rooms are furnished purely in the Anglo-Saxon manner, with a Norman staircase and Vandal ceilings. By no means omit a Japanese museum, which should not be encased, as in ruder times, but scattered generously all over the house at convenient intervals. In place of pictures, hang your walls with blue crockery, as much nicked as possible.

"The most recherché ornaments for a parlor table are cracked tea-cups of a great age. A blue China monster, at least three feet high, must stand in the front hall. This has a particularly Buddhist effect. We have perhaps encroached a little upon the domain of the decorator in these hints; but the reader will not be ungrateful for any instruction which will enable him to make a really grotesque and graceful house.

"Such a house as this (without the blue monster or other furniture) can be built for eight thousand five hundred dollars. Your land may cost you a couple of thousand more."

Corona was much impressed and depressed by these and many similar descriptions. She found no American house which came within her modest means. Her five hundred dollars would scarcely build a Gothic wood-shed, much less the Buddhist effect. And neither a blue monster, nor a coachman, nor a situation where the children would be free from pulmonary complaints seemed to have a vital connection with her immediate and personal needs.

Then the plans. Well, the plans, it must be confessed. Corona did find it difficult to understand. She always had found it difficult to understand such things; but then she had hoped several weeks of close architectural study would shed light upon the density of the subject. She grew quite morbid about it. She counted the steps when she went up-stairs to bed at night. She estimated the bedroom post when she waked in the cold gray dawn. At midnight, when it stormed, she lay wondering if the poet's roof in the "long unhappy night, when the rain was on" it, were slate, or tar-and-gravel, or if he could afford honest shingles and dormer windows.

But the most perplexing thing about the plan was how one story ever got upon another. Corona's imagination never fully grappled with this fact, although her intellect accepted it. She took her books downstairs one night, and Susy came and looked them over.

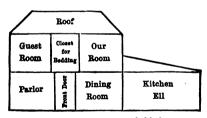
"Why, these houses are all one-story,"

said Susy. "Besides, they're nothing but lines, anyway. I should n't draw a house so."

Corona laughed with some embarrassment and no effort at enlightenment. She was not used to finding herself and Susy so nearly on the same intellectual level as in this instance. She merely asked: "How should you draw it?"

"Why, so," said Susy, after some severe thought. So she took her little blunt lead pencil, that the baby had chewed, and drew her plan as follows:—

SUSY'S PLAN.



Nursery and your room behind.

Corona made no comment upon this plan, except to ask Susy if that were the way to spell L; and then to look in the dictionary,

and find that it was not spelled at all. Tom came in, and asked to see what they were doing.

"I'm helping Corona," said Susy, with much complacency. "These architects' things don't look any more like houses than they do like the first proposition in Euclid; and the poor girl is puzzled."

"I'll help you to-morrow, Co," said Tom, who was in too much of a hurry to glance at his wife's plan. But to-morrow Tom went into town by the early train, and when Corona emerged from her "North American Homes," with wild eye and knotted brow, at 5 o'clock P. M., she found Susy crying over a telegram, which ran:—

Called to California immediately. Those lost cargoes A No. 1 hides turned up. Can't get home to say good-by. Send overcoat and flannels by Simpson on midnight express. Gone four weeks. Love to all.

Tom.

This unexpected event threw Corona entirely upon her own resources; and, after a

few days more of patient research, she put on her hat, and stole away at dusk to a builder she knew of down-town — a nice, fatherly man, who had once built a piazza for Tom and had just been elected superintendent of the Sunday-school. These combined facts gave Corona confidence to trust her case to his hands. She carried a neat little plan of her own with her, the result of several days' hard labor. plan she had taken the precaution to cut into paper dolls for the baby. Corona found the good man at home, and in her most business-like manner presented her points.

"Got any plan in yer own head?" asked the builder, hearing her in silence. In silence Corona laid before him the paper which had cost her so much toil.

It was headed in her clear black hand:-

PLAN

FOR A SMALL BUT HAPPY

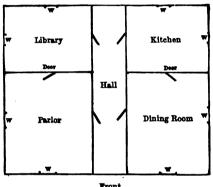
HOME.

This was

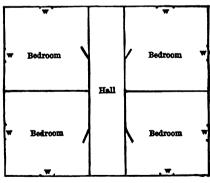
CORONA'S PLAN.

GROUND FLOOR.

Back Door.



Front Door.



SECOND FLOOR.

- "Well," said the builder, after a silence,
 "well, I've seen worse."
 - "Thank you," said Corona, faintly.
 - "How does she set?" asked the builder.
- "Who set?" said Corona, a little wildly. She could think of nothing that set but hens.
- "Why, the house. Where's the points o' compass?"
- "I hadn't thought of those," said Corona.
- "And the chimney," suggested the builder. "Where's your chimneys?"
- "I did n't put in any chimneys," said Corona.
- "Where do you count on your stairs?" pursued the builder.
 - "Stairs? I forgot the stairs."
- "That's natural," said Mr. Timbers.

 "Had a plan brought me once without an entry or a window to it. It was n't a woman did it, neither. It was a widower, in the noospaper line. What's your scale?"
- "Scale?" asked Corona, without anima-

"Scale of feet. Proportions."

"Oh! I didn't have any scales, but I thought about forty feet front would do. I have but five hundred dollars. A small house must answer."

The builder smiled. He said he would show her some plans. He took a book from his table and opened at a plate representing a small, snug cottage, not uncomely. It stood in a flourishing apple orchard, and a much larger house appeared dimly in the distance, upon a hill. The cottage was what is called a "story-and-half" and contained six rooms. The plan was drawn with the beauty of science.

"There," said Mr. Timbers, "I know a lady built one of those upon her brother-in-law's land. He give her the land, and she just put up the cottage, and they was all as pleasant as pease about it. That's about what I'd recommend to you, if you don't object to the name of it."

"What is the matter with the name?" asked Corona.

"Why," said the builder, hesitating, "it is called the Old Maid's House—in the book."

"Mr. Timbers," said Corona, with decision, "why should we seek further than the truth? I will have that house. Pray draw me the plan at once."

III.

BUILDING.

CORONA had now decided to build her house, and how to build it. She had also concluded to build at once. These points were clear and simple. But another remained. One day Susy said, carelessly, "I forgot to ask you where?" and Corona said, "Where what?"

"Where you are going to have your house, Sweetens-eetens-eet! Was she petsy Mamma's pet ounlydountytweetens!" said Susy.

These latter remarks Corona recognized, from their high intellectual nature and great perspicacity of construction, as not addressed personally so much to herself as to the baby; who was amiably striking her mother in the face at that moment with

both fists clenched in an engaging manner peculiar to her species.

Corona replied that she was hesitating between Patagonia and Alaska.

"Be sure and get near enough for us to drive," vaguely suggested Susy, who never heard anything anybody said when the baby was more interesting than usual.

"It won't make any more real difference to them — than that!" said Corona to herself, in that bitter little mental aside in which the sweetest and sunniest people living the solitary life will indulge now and then.

So far as is clearly known, perhaps, this was the moment in which she decided to build in Fairharbor.

Fairharbor is in Massachusetts. Corona had spent several seasons there, in the uncertain capacity of "summer folks" and "perm'nent boarder." Her experience with landladies had been large, varied, and pathetic, and just as she had found one to whom she thought she could be happy to

return year by year, the excellent woman — like other people who have reached an unusual pitch of sanctification — died.

Yet what were summer without the sea,
—its purpose, its passion, its rapture?

"I will build my house," said Corona, "in Fairharbor."

And so it was settled. To be sure, Susy said she did not see how Corona could decide anything so important while Tom was away. But, nevertheless, it was settled.

Corona went on to Fairharbor with the builder, to select and lease her land. When I say that it was March, I need add nothing about the weather. Corona felt very independent and very cold. She and the builder stood together on the cliff-side which she had chosen, and yelled at one another through the thunder of the wind and surf.

"Beautiful view!" screamed Corona, trying to look rapturously upon the familiar outlines of sea and harbor, shore, and town, and sky, beating about there now, sullenly and confused in the untamed air.

- "Just so!" cried the builder. "I would n't have it more 'n fifty-two, if I was you."
- "I said a lovely vie-ew-ew!" shrieked Corona.
- "Oh! yes. S'pose it is. Yes. Thought you referred to the proportions. Land being skerce and high. Fifty-two feet square ought to do you, I should say. Have to chain her, though."
- "Chain who?" (It was too cold to surrender force to grammar.)
 - "Why, the house."
 - "Chain to what?"
 - "Why, the rock."
 - "What for?"

Corona had approached the builder, struggling against the "storm," as she had long since learned from Fairharborians to call the wind that came without the rain.

"Well," said the builder, "I don't wish to be discouragin'. I know ladies will have notions about views and lo-cations. It's to be expected. But this spot you've chose is the most exposed of any I can perspect in

Fairharbor. If you don't chain yourself to the rock, you may find yourself down on the beach yonder some mornin'. But I would n't wish to be discouraging. And if you chain her, she can't."

"I object to living in a chained house. I should feel as if my house were my slave, and not my friend. I want my house to be my best friend."

"Eh!" said Mr. Timbers, with a quick, intelligent smile. "So ye may; so ye may. I understand. Houses are like folks. They like to be petted and made of. She don't want to be neglected, a house don't. Now, when you close 'em and leave 'em, a house feels it. A house degenerates and runs to wrack twice as soon as if 't was wore by livin' in it. Just as it is with persons. They degenerate if they live alone too long. Yes, houses are like folks; but chains won't hurt her. She won't mind."

"I shall, if she does n't," returned Corona, persistently. "We must find a spot where my house will be contented to stay of its own free will."

When they had wandered about in the wind and discussed the matter till Corona was quite hoarse, when she had pointed out to the builder all the locations which she liked, and when the builder had raised insuperable objections to every one, Corona suggested that if he could find a place not too windy nor too sunny, too hard, too soft, too wet, too dry, too anything, he should select the spot himself and put the house on it at once.

"All I ask is permission to live in it," said Corona, meekly. "Do as you like. I shall perish if I stay here another minute, and I've no heir to leave the place to but my sister-in-law, who has neuralgia at the seaside."

"No offense, I hope?" asked Mr. Timbers, anxiously; "but, you see, women-folks don't know so much as they might. I'll blast out this ridge for ye, if ye say so—the house is yours; but it would cost you a hundred more, besides the damp."

"Blast the ridge!" replied Corona. But she saved her good name by an interrogation point. "Blast the ridge? No, we will let the ridge go. Build in the harbor, if you want to; only build, and let me go and get warm." Thereupon Corona made her way to the nearest house, crouching in the grasp of the terrible blast as she was blown, slipping and running, over the "sweet fields" and hearty rocks so dear to her, but alien now, with the thin ice and dry, sparse snow of the unfamiliar time. Mr. Timbers remained, to take some measurements, in company with the owner of the land.

They were fishing people in the house whither Corona fled — neighbors and friends. They gave her the great welcome of seabound and solitary families. They held her by the purple hands and piled the wood upon the kitchen stove. They said, "Is your health good in winter-time?" They looked at her fondly. They had never seen her in the winter before. The children of

the house put their fingers timidly upon her furs. They had always thought of her as wearing white linen and straw hats the whole year round.

Corona felt her heart warm toward these good people. When they said they were glad she was going to build and settle down amongst us, she thanked them gratefully. She looked over at the sheltered spot below her favorite bowlder, where the figures of the men passed to and fro, taking surveyor's measurement for her little lot of precious shore and her infinity of sea; and it seemed to her as if she were acting in the first scene of a dramatic poem, gentle and grave enough, but long and sweet and full of alluring uncertainties. She had never thought that uncertainty could seem pleasant to one again, after one was done with being young. When she saw Mr. Timbers strike a pick into the ground and set a crowbar down to the frozen heart of her future home, she thrilled from head to foot.

"I'll warm a bigger place for you to look

out," said one of the children, breathing on the frosted pane. This kind intent proving unsuccessful — for the frost was dense the boy licked the window generously.

"Oh, thank you!" said Corona, in a glow of feeling.

"It's been a cold winter," said the woman of the house. "We've burned a sight of coal. It's taken six ton to keep this house warm—these five rooms. When I lived up-town, back from the water, I made a ton last. It comes hard. And William's had back luck. Nor the boys ain't done much better. But I'd rather live down here. I can watch the boat. There! That's their sail."

Corona looked out through the uncurtained spot that the kindness of her little host had left for her glad and hopeful eyes. She saw the chilly white speck on the gray horizon. The nearer water showed blue and cold. And on the beach, where she had always seen the hot sand glitter, flecks of ice lay tossing with the weeds. They had a cruel look, like teeth.

Corona turned to the fisher-people with a feeling new and gentle, such as she had never had to any one before. She thought of their scant, denied, imperilled lives, their uncomplaining and courageous hearts. When the good woman brought hot tea for her, she said to herself, "We shall be neighbors." It seemed to her she had never really had a neighbor. She experienced a new emotion.

"We've got her laid," said Mr. Timbers, coming in,—"we've got her laid out true; and when you and him have signed your lease, that's all you've got to do about her. I'll have my men to work first day the frost gets. It won't be long, now. S'pose you like it here in summer, eh? It appears to me it's a little windy."

Soon after her first trip to Fairharbor, Corona went a little way into the country, to visit an old schoolmate with a new baby. One day the baby fell into the fire, and Corona sprang to pick it out, and sprained her ankle. This gallant deed and its untoward consequence confined her for some weeks to the house.

Mr. Timbers had said that he thought it would be well for her to run down to Fair-harbor occasionally during the erection of her house; and Corona-had said that she should certainly come very often.

Meanwhile, the carpenters were at work. Corona had contracted with Mr. Timbers that the cottage should be finished by the middle of May. She had made this provision with a keen sense of the accepted helplessness of her sex in such matters, and a keener desire to be on her guard against the traditional imposition of the builders. She would have expected Mr. Timbers to cheat her, had he not been superintendent of the Sunday-school. And now here she was, wearing upon the delicate health of her hostess; dependent upon the surgery of a more than rural doctor, who said he had dog-nosed the case; and reduced entirely to her imagination and the daily mail (it seemed to make everything worse that it was brought five miles by a stage-coach) for any knowledge of her now sacred and absorbing interests at Fairharbor.

The builder wrote often. One day he asked, Would she have cedar post?

And Corona, whose architectural education was already rusting out, wrote back: "What do I need a cedar post for?"

Another time he said that the A No. 1 shingles he ordered had not come; but, by mistake, only the best pine shingles. He thought he might use those, seeing they were on hand, and he would make it square on the estimate. Corona, in some indignation, telegraphed that, of course, she wanted the best pine shingles under any circumstances.

Mr. Timbers leisurely replied that best shingles did not mean best shingles, and that nothing was best but A No. 1. This was honest but perplexing, and in either light it was lost time.

The next day he sent word that he

thought the kitchen closet had better be built in the parlor, and that, if 't was his he'd turn the piazza the lee side of the house; that one of his men had hammered a finger off, and one was drunk, and another had a baby to bury, which delayed the work; that he thought he should leave the kitchen unfinished till she got there, on account of the sink and a few such; and that the weather was against them, for it had rained ever since he began.

Then followed a peculiarly harrowing correspondence about details, which at this helpless distance assumed enormous and morbid importance in Corona's mind, and the discussion of which Mr. Timbers always closed with the remark that the weather was against them and it had rained ever since they began. It was invariably bright sunlight when Corona received these letters.

For the first time, she began to wish that Tom were at home to help her; but the Corliss engine could not have wrung from her the acknowledgment of this not unworthy sentiment.

She found a certain relief in occupying herself with preparations for the internal arrangements of her home. Susy had promised (if there were a closet for it) to provide the bedding; and the mother of the baby that fell into the fire kindly agreed to mark the pillow-cases in tambour cotton. Corona felt grateful for the removal of these important burdens. But enough remained. As she lay upon her lounge, in her friend's "spare room," they gathered awful proportions. Things to be done dawned upon her, one at a time, in a diseased, sporadic way. Now it was the fixture of a bedroom curtain. Now a poker for the parlor grate. Then she remembered she had n't any grate to poke. Then, by some incredible psychological caprice, her attention would concentrate itself upon the clothes-horse. Did clothes-horses grow in Fairharbor? How should she get one from Boston, if they did n't? Suddenly she would

be overcome by a fierce anxiety about the nature of waffle-irons, and then she would remember that she must have a broom. In the depths of the night there would mysteriously darken down upon her the consciousness that she could never keep house without salt-cellars. In the sparkle of the dawn she would jerk herself feverishly upright in bed, to wonder if dish-towels came fringed. At moments her whole soul reeled beneath the prospect of getting her sheets marked: and at others the realization of the fact that she must have soft soap for Mondays seemed a burden greater than she could bear. Two things in particular assumed curious and portentous shapes in her imagination. One was the clothes-post, and another was the hogshead for rain-water. How should she get the hogshead? How should she get any rain, if she had a hogs-How could she keep house till she had a clothes-post? And how could she get a clothes-post till she had begun to keep house? Night after night she dreamed of

hogsheads and clothes-posts. She waked cold with her efforts to plant the clothes-post in the parlor carpet, and weak with the attempt to set a lunch-table for sixteen upon the slippery surface of the hogshead. Her mind became a frightful chaos of household detail.

Corona was not of precisely what we call a domestic temperament, and this experience had some distressing effects. There, for instance, were the pin-cushions. noon it occurred to her that she could not have a house without pin-cushions, and from that unhappy hour her tortured fancy had no rest. She had never made a pin-cushion in her life. It seemed to her that it would be easier to make a man-of-war. Corona was determined to keep the balance of power economical and artistic in her modest She would not fill even a cushion with a "dear" stuffing in a cheap house. She would not have emery and silk with matched boards and bare floors. She agitated herself over these appalling questions.

That came, perhaps, of being a woman, she thought. Did men think about pincushions when they built houses? Six rooms — six pin-cushions. Six colors for six pin-cushions in six rooms. She tormented herself with calculations. One day she said to her friend:—

"I'll tear my heart out and put it into the spare room before I will think about this any longer. The only trouble is they might find it a little hard."

"It could be used for hairpins," said her friend, absently. "I should flute it, too, and put a mock Valenciennes cover on."

As regarded the morals of pin-cushions, so with furniture and decoration.

"I'll have no upholstery too fine for my house. In a five-hundred-dollar house nothing should be more than twenty-five cents a yard," pronounced Corona, with the consciousness of the highest principle and (what is more comforting) of the purest taste to support her. "My purpose is to make the loveliest possible home out of the least pos-

sible money; and in the history of all purposes, harmony is the chief element of power."

"Buy your furniture at a factory in the white," telegraphed Tom, one day, from California, in the perfectly disconnected but useful manner characteristic of Tom when he gave advice. He had not written to Corona since he went away. A serial story could not have so convinced her that his busy heart remembered her. And in the moment, the worry and wear of her somewhat solitary plans dissolved like the fogs within the sunrise on her own golden harbor shore. She had almost cried, the day before, when she went out alone (her first walk since her accident), to buy her own silver. It had seemed to her a very pathetic thing to do. Now it seemed rather amusing than otherwise. How Tom would laugh! And Tom remembered her; always had. She put the foolish, extravagant telegram to her lips. She said "Dear Tom," sitting alone. Her heart lifted. She was sure she should be happy in her house.

Besides, the silver was plated. It was n't worth a sentiment, however cheap.

"Let me catch you at it again!" said Corona, apostrophizing her wet lashes in the glass. "I'll feed you off of pewter, if I do!"

Corona was interrupted by the stage rumbling by with the afternoon mail. She dried her eyes and went over to the office, where she found two letters. One was from Susy, and ran:—

DEAR Co, — I hope you're coming home soon. Baby has the mumps. There are a great many express packages for you that keep coming. It will remind you how many friends you have. I have taken the liberty — I knew you would n't care — I opened them all. Sixteen of them are pin-cushions and fourteen are tidies. One is a patent nutmeg-grater.

Yours, aff.,

SUE.

1

P. S. — The tidies are all green and fifteen of the cushions are red. The other letter was from the builder, and read as follows:—

FAIRHARBOR.

DEAR MADAM, — I should like to have you send your furniture on at once. We find it won't go up the stairs. We must build it into the house.

The weather has been very poor and it has rained almost ever since we began to work.

Yours, with respect,

G. W. TIMBERS.

IV.

POSSESSION.

CORONA recovered the use of her ankle so slowly that, as Susy said, so long as Baby had the mumps it did not seem wise to visit Fairharbor just at present. Corona sighed and submitted. She held the baby, with one foot on a chair, and contented herself by writing more or less contradictory orders to her builder by every mail. Corona had her share of friends - kind, obliging, good people; but there seemed to be no one of them on whom she felt at precise liberty to call and say: "Run down to Fairharbor in the month of April, and put a house in order for a lame woman." At the age Corona had reached, a woman's friends are more or less unavailable to her for emergencies. of them had neuralgia or a baby, sick-headaches or a husband, a public school or a bronchial cough. If not these, then a widower, a minister, a Sunday-school, a mother, a flirtation, or a Society for the Elevation of the Human Race, to keep them at home. More and more, as Corona grew older, she was impressed by the great helplessness of human friendship.

"We don't serve each other very far," whispered Corona, mournfully, to the baby. "It is little we can do, after all. We hold out a hand now and then, impulsively or guardedly, as the case may be; we throng on and pass; we jostle and are gone; we reserve our real needs from each other as if they were guilty secrets. Who perceives when his friend is starving? Who cries out: Give me bread? Emerson was right when he said"—

"I think her left cheek has gone down a little," observed Susy, coming in. She anxiously watched the baby, bending low over it. The mother and child regarded each other so closely that each perceived its own

countenance daguerreotyped in the other's affectionate eyes.

"They have a right to their eye-beams, and all the rest is Fate," finished Corona, aloud.

She reproached herself that afternoon. What did she want, then, that she should sit and challenge the sacred name of Friendship, like a beggar whining on a curbstone? She, with her fourteen tidies, sixteen pincushions, and a nutmeg-grater? She, with Susy, and the baby (and the mumps), and Tom, and a cottage in Fairharbor, and her own sweet way?

"Is this what they mean by growing old-maidish?" said Corona, giving herself a moral jerk. "Is it to grow peevish and critical, and mope because you've done exactly as you wanted to, and must adjust yourself to consequences? And Tom is coming home to-morrow. More shame to you!" cried Corona, with another jerk.

"Why! I'll go down and look after your cottage," said Tom, when he got

home. "I'll go the day before, and have it all as slick as a whistle. Then I'll stay — let me see — I'll stay two nights and a day besides. Sue can't; that's clear. I can. I'd rather than not, Coro. I'll get supper. Gracious!" added Tom, reflectively, "you see if I don't get supper."

It was the seventeenth of June — a clear day, brisk and fresh, full of color and that indefinable elasticity of atmosphere which makes a light heart. On the fifteenth, Mr. Timbers had sent the keys of her house to Corona. He was sorry not to have the work done in May; but the weather had been against them, he said, and it had rained ever since they began. On the sixteenth, as good as his word, Tom had gone on to make the cottage ready for Corona; who followed with her baggage, her servant, and her lame ankle, in the afternoon of the following day.

The name of the good woman whom Corona carried with her was Puella Virginia. Puella Virginia was a kind person,

no longer young, who had once (in Corona's tender years) nursed her through the measles and had given her grapes when nobody was looking. It would be difficult to say why these facts had induced Corona to select Puella Virginia as the guide, philosopher, and friend of her future life; but certain it is that they had their influence. As the time came to leave Tom's house, a certain unreasonable homesickness overtook her. Puella Virginia seemed to her like somebody she had lived with before.

"I think I shall call you Elvir," said Corona, as they drove from the Fairharbor station through the crooked, crawling streets of the old seaport town, out upon the Cape and down to the broad shore, where there waited for her the home which she had never seen. She felt so overwhelmed with excitement at that moment it seemed to her that if she had to say anything so long as Puella Virginia she should cry.

"Just as you please," said Puella Virginia, with some dignity.

Ah! Well, there it was. Corona drew her breath. Sharp against the familiar sky, the unfamiliar outline cut the air. It was a little house. It was a very little house. It had a story and a half, a hogshead, and a clothes-post. It had a piazza, and it was brown. Corona took these facts in swiftly to a vehemently confused mind. The front door opened toward the water. It was sunset and full tide. The waves leaped high. They came so near that she could have sprung into them from the piazza steps. They were heavily bronzed and gilded by the color of the sky, and brilliant foam flew about, for the wind was rising.

Puella Virginia made her way at once into the house, buffeting with the wind; but Corona stood still upon the rocks. She stood in the shadow of the little brown house. Her eyes sought the emblazoned waters and the flushed sky, then filled.

- "You are mine!" she whispered.
- "Can't speak to a fellow?" said a voice behind her.

It was a sound more familiar than the Harbor waves, dearer than the Harbor sky. Corona turned quickly.

"I told you I'd have it ready," said Tom.
"I'm glad Puella has come; but everything is in beautiful order."

Tom stood in the doorway, in his shirtsleeves. The signs of honest toil were on his manly brow. His left cheek was a little smutty and he held a gridiron in one hand. Something was dropping from it on the piazza in a leisurely manner.

"It's only gravy," said Tom, calmly. "I tried a soup and some scrambled eggs, and I baked a few beans; but something ailed them all, so I just sent up for a chop. I'm glad Puella has come; but everything is in order. You'd better come in. It blows so we can't keep anything open. There! Tell Puella to shut the kitchen door, or the house will be lifted off its moorings. I find we always have to keep the kitchen door shut. A lot of things blew out this morning. I had to hire a boy to run after them. I

don't know what they were. They seemed to be little things, mostly, with ribbons and laces. Came in the bureau drawers. I guess they were what you call tidies, or night-caps perhaps, or neck-ties --- something of that Have to shut the windows, too: it blows so. Don't sit down there. I left your Psyche there till I could find a place for her. Oh! no; there are a lot of pic-The boy I hired broke a few when he helped me unpack; but it's nothing se-Here, I'll find a place. There was rious. a sofa here a few minutes ago. Oh! yes, it's under the sheets and pillow-cases. Now, there! Pretty tired? Welcome home, my dear. Everything in beautiful order. till I give this toasting-rack to Puella. Everything's in"-

Tom retired with the gridiron, more or less incoherently; and Corona looked about her. She sat in a little gray parlor, to which the front door, opening directly, had introduced her. Three unopened packing-boxes and a refrigerator stood in the room. Sheets and

table-cloths lay plentifully scattered upon the furniture; broken glass crackled beneath her feet; the uncarpeted floor was black with the foot-marks of carpenters, masons, and painters: the refrigerator had been dragged in without casters, and had left a long, deep, jagged cut upon the soft pine floor and thresh-Confusedly she noticed her best Tennyson lying under the stove; a pot of yellow paint in a corner stood upon a pile of muslin curtains. At intervals she observed specimens of her fourteen green tidies. Tom seemed to have labored under the impression that they were lamp-mats, and to have spread them upon tables and shelves till he began to get tired. Upon the otherwise empty book-cases, she recognized more or less of her pincushions, piled high and looking particularly red.

"Everything's in order — most," said Tom, coming back and looking about with a tired, happy face. "Only a few little things, like these. There won't be any milk till morning, and the hogshead's empty, and something's out of kilter with the kitchen stove. But all the beds are up, and Puella says we can sleep here just as well as not."

"Sleep here!" echoed Corona. "Why, where should we"—

"Excuse me," said Puella Virginia, knockat the door at that moment and pushing in without an answer. "But now look here! Your brother's done heaps; heaps: but there's heaps left! Now look here! There's a woman out here at the back door says she's a neighbor, and you must be busy, and won't you come to tea with her?"

"Oh! yes," said Tom, reviving. "I've had my meals there so far. They're excellent. Her husband's a fisherman. They've been very kind. I call her the Good Samaritan. We might go; only there's my chop."

Tom looked disappointed.

"Now look here!" advised Puella Virginia. "If you'll excuse me, you'd better go. Take that there chop along. She won't mind. Take it over with you, and get a

quiet, decent supper; and when you get there, stay there. I'll call you by and by. He's all tuckered out. Keep him over there. I don't want no help, and there's supper enough in the lunch-bag for me."

"Well," said Tom, looking relieved, "perhaps we may as well. I meant to have your supper ready; but, as Puella says, there is a good deal to do. Let us go."

"Very well," said Corona. She felt as if she were visiting. It did not occur to her to offer any suggestions.

Tom took the chop, which Puella put into the first dish that came to hand (it proved to be a soap-dish), and meekly led the way to the Good Samaritan's. Corona limped after him, in a dazed condition. It was late before Puella Virginia called them; and Tom and Corona were too tired to look about, but hurried off to bed in the heavy shadows of the strange, disordered little house. Puella gave them each a candle set into a bottle.

"Oh, yes!" said Corona. "I forgot candlesticks."

"Oh, yes!" said Tom. "I forgot the kerosene."

"There is n't any bolster anywhere round, is there?" called Tom from his room, through the thin matched-board wall, which was blue on Corona's side and green on his.

"Oh!" said Corona. "I forgot bolsters." Just as Corona was sinking into her first

sweet sleep there came a deprecatory wail from the green side of the wall.

"Oh! I say, Co! Sorry to trouble you; but you have n't got such a thing as soap or towels in the house, have you?"

"No," said Corona. "I forgot the soap and the towels."

In the middle of the night there was a crash. It was a terrible crash. Corona, terrified, sprang from her bed. Puella Virginia ran around in her night-dress. Even in her terror Corona found this a memorable sight.

"It's only me!" cried Tom, with ungrammatical reassurance. "Something's happened to this cheap bed. I believe

I'm on the floor. I don't know where the bed is."

Corona hurried to his rescue. True enough. Her cheap furniture, "bought in the white," had surrendered to Tom's honest and sufficient bulk; and in a débris of slats and springs the big fellow lay inglorious. The head-board of the new bed leaned in a sickly manner against the sea-green wall, while the foot-board sought the support of the wash-stand, on which a dusty pitcher stood unfilled and inhospitable. It was a most homesick and depressing sight.

"Oh!" said Tom, after the two had regarded it in silence for some portentous moments, "I remember. I forgot the clamps!"

And thus the evening and the morning were the first day of Corona's domestic life. Truth compels me to state that it was not until the following sunset that any measure of calm settled upon that chaotic household. Corona had expected to feel more or less of the impressiveness of the experience which can come but once to any human exestings.

— the first possession of the first four walls which we call our own. On the contrary, she found her mind as devoid of sentiment as a last year's grocer's bill. But suddenly. as the night drew down, a swift and almost sacred change fell upon her, like the change of metre in the Psalms of David. When she went to dress for tea - getting into something fresh and soft, with lace and color and heard for the first time in her own house her own supper-bell vigorously chiming in Puella Virginia's warm hands, her heart leaped; and then it seemed to kneel. stole gently down. The dining-room was tiny, neat, and bright. The table was set, and the late light from the west fell in upon the plated — No, those were her mother's spoons. Her lip quivered. She said:—

"You surprised me, Tom." But she could not say anything more.

There was a note there from Susy, too, with Chinese teacups. There were several things on the table she had not seen before.

"People kept sending them," said Tom, kindly.

And the Good Samaritan made and sent the smoking rolls. She thought "they'd be too beat out to cook."

Corona and Tom sat down. Tom did not usually "ask grace" at table. He had reserved opinions about the custom, though now and then, Corona remembered, he had conformed to it; but never, she was sure, when his thoughts were light. To-night Tom hesitated a moment. Then he bowed his head and said:—

"O Thou who dwellest in so many homes, possess thyself of this. Thou who settest the solitary in families, bless the life which is sheltered here. Grant that trust and peace and comfort may abide within; and that love and light and usefulness may go from out this house forever."

"Amen!" said heavily an unexpected voice. It was Puella Virginia, standing in the kitchen doorway, with waffles.

INSIDE AND OUT. -- ALONE.

And now Tom was gone. "Give me your blessing and a sandwich," he had said; "but don't get up, nor a breakfast." As a matter of course, therefore, Puella Virginia's mènu was more than usually elaborate; and Corona rose an hour too soon, to pick wild roses for Susy. Tom held out patient hands for them, swore not at all when the thorns got under his gloves, kissed Corona twice, said he'd come again and bring the baby, and indeed he was gone. The Fairharbor omnibus, very impatient and very yellow, trundled off with him laboriously. went over the hill, he looked back, and saw Corona standing on the great bowlder to wave her hand. Her figure stood higher than the little brown house. She wore blue, and seemed cut like a solitary silhouette against the paler sky.

She went back into the house slowly. She and Puella Virginia were quite alone. Corona wandered restlessly about the still unordered rooms. For half an hour she wondered how she should like living in her own house. The sun was fresh, the sea was fair, the air was sweet, the wild roses looked in, the tide went out peacefully. Puella from the kitchen reminded her that there was enough to do in this house to take two folks a month. But Tom was gone.

"I'll go to walk," said Corona, decidedly, to herself. "I'm going to walk, Pu—Elvir," she said to Puella, faintly.

Up to this time she had felt as if she were visiting Tom. Now she felt as if she were boarding with Puella. She almost appealed to her for permission to carry out a preference.

"There hain't a stitch took nor a chair dusted," said Puella, with dissatisfaction.
"Ye put up all the curtains and pictures

before I'd scrubbed a floor. Ye tended to them statoos and books; but look at yer parlor windows!"

- "Puella Vir Elvir," said Corona, gently, "I don't know how to keep house, I'm afraid. But you will do it for me, I am sure."
- "Will ye trust me?" asked Puella, after some thought.
- "If I did n't trust you I should not have invited you to live with me," said Corona, gently still. "We shall be a long while together, Puella; and often and much alone. I hope that we shall make each other happy and become true friends."

Puella Virginia was silent. No lady had ever spoken to her like that. She watched Corona as she paced the beach in the bright morning; her refined, slender figure bending to the light breeze from the east. Puella Virginia was a big woman.

"Well, yes," she said, after some thought, speaking aloud. "I'll make her happy, if I can. Bless her, yes!"

Corona walked a long time. The beach,

left by the departed tide, was a web of soft shades. She was captured in it. Gray, pearl, silver, mauve, sepia, olive green, and dull white tints betokened sand and weeds, perhaps; but to her eye they took the figure of a huge palette. The semicircle of the shore curved, and she stood within it musing and reluctant, like the artist's hand before the virgin color.

Toward noon the sky became overcast with soft, warm clouds. They had gray hearts. Faint forms of blue showed through, evanescent. The shore wore veils of blue-The water, which had been green haze. blue and brilliant at an earlier hour, grew gray; but seemed warmer for this change of countenance. Rays of light fell across the harbor; from where, one knew not. were long, narrow, fine, and bright. As she watched them, they throbbed; they seemed like the glittering, scaly backs of unknown sea creatures. There were few vessels upon These moved in and out on the harbor. mysterious and idle errands, through a silver atmosphere. Little dories trailed after them. On the rocks were gentle breakers; the foam was all at play. When Corona came into the house, the light lay thin, warm, and still across the parlor floor.

She told Puella Virginia that she thought she would get a bath; and Puella, without protest, brought her bathing-dress. Corona dreamily wandered down to a little cove where the sand was warm and the cliffs were high, and gave greeting to the ocean with the passion which only his lovers understand. She flung herself under the green fire of the "third wave," and said: "I am alive! alive!"

Corona felt exhilarated all that day. She had a good appetite and large aspirations. She took Tom's seat at table, and looked through open doors upon the silver sea. She ate an extra piece of cake for dessert, out of sheer sense of life. Puella Virginia hung up the curtains alone. Corona could not work. The world was too fair—or the cake too full of saleratus. At inter-

vals she said to Puella: "I must remember to call you Elvir." She had never once remembered it.

It will be of interest, perhaps, to the reader who has followed Corona's uneventful history, to be introduced more distinctly to the home which five hundred dollars and an old maid had founded. The house, as I have said, was brown; the blinds and trimmings were of a darker shade than the walls of narrow matched boards. The cottage contained five rooms and a kitchen. body of this imposing building stood twenty feet square upon the ground. The kitchen measured nine feet by eight, and there was a wood-shed, three feet wide, in which Puella managed to pile the wood, and various domestic mysteries into which Corona felt no desire to penetrate. There were a parlor, a dining-room, a guest-room, and two rooms left for "the family." There were two closets, a coal-bin, and a loft. house stood on what, for want of a scientific term, Corona called piers; and Puella Vixginia found infinite capabilities in what might, could, would, or should have been the cellar, if this valuable space had been closed in. The two women preferred it as it was. Corona could see the clover growing. What so delightful as to see clover growing beneath one's house! And Puella Virginia said it would keep out rats. But the boy whom Tom hired to help unpack—he was the Good Samaritan's boy, and his name was Zerubbabel—Zerubbabel objected. He said he didn't like to see a house on stilts.

Corona's house had no plaster, no papering, and no carpets. Her parlor, which, as I have said, opened directly upon the water, was painted gray; the walls were of the paler color in a gull's wing; the ceiling had the tint of dulled pearls; the floor was rock gray (a border of black ran around this floor); the beams and rafters, left visible by the absence of plastering, were touched with what is known to artists as neutral tint. The effects were all simply combined, and

their factors to be found without difficulty upon the palette of the Fairharbor house and sign painter. Several felt mats were on the floor. They were of that individual and indescribable color for which the Yankee mind has no better name than cherry. They were fringed with gray. The dadoband was formed of wood-cuts. They were of the same shape and size and fitted nicely. They were all landscapes. Puella called them "views." They were bordered by a fine painted line of black. The effect of them was soft and rich. Corona had been some years in collecting them from American and English magazines. A frieze of cardinal flowers finished the top of the room. These were cut from chromos bought by the wholesale at an auction. They bore the burning carmine tint, which was the light of the room, and at that height had an incredible air of refinement. The curtains in this room were cotton flannel, of a silver shade, bordered and tied with cherry. The cheap and comfortable lounges which Mr. Timbers had made were upholstered also in gray cotton flannel. They had bright pillows. A deck-chair stood at the eastern window, with cherry ribbons. Corona's books, statuettes, and pictures were abundant in this room. There was a tiny open stove. The rocking-chair was old and generous; the table-cloth was one of Susy's, that happened to be kind in color; and the room had the air of having been lived in a long time.

In the dining-room there was no paint. The soft wood walls and floor and ceiling were oiled without color, and the fine characteristic yellow tints of the pine looked through. The little room absorbed much light. It was curtained with English silesia, of a golden brown. Susy had worked oakleaves upon the curtains. A shelf to hold Corona's modest store of bric-à-brac (consisting at this stage in her history of the tea-urn, one caddy, some India shells, and the collar-bone of a deformed haddock that Zerubbabel gave her) was finished with hem-

lock bark. The rafters in the ceiling of this room were covered with the thin lichens that grow on stones and the trunks of trees. Gold-paper behind them gave out flecks like sunlight in a dense place.

Puella Virginia's room was as yet unfinished. Corona had thought it courtesy to wait and consult the taste of its occupant.

Corona's room was blue, shading swiftly from the floor to the ceiling, which was very pale. Butterflies were on this ceiling, cut from natural history specimen cards. They were all of pale colors — white and gold or rose. The windows were draped with two old-fashioned dresses that Corona and Susy had once alike. They were blue-and-white muslin, and had grown soft with many washings.

The guest room was green — floor, walls, furniture. Corona hired a man for a day's wages to paint the furniture, while she watched and directed him. The walls she hung abundantly with ferns, pressed and securely fastened with gum tragacanth. There

was much of the creeping fern. The curtains were of cheap white muslin, and were not tied. The room looked like a bower.

There was not, let me add, a stork, a bulrush, a Japanese fan, nor a grandmother's tea-cup in the house. I am describing, of course, the appearance of Corona's cottage as it existed in her imagination until the end of several weeks' occupancy and opportunity. In the political economy of household art decoration the slightest possible sum of money may be made to accomplish the largest conceivable results; but the one condition of which the most lavish expenditure is necessary is time. Possibly one might add to this a little talent. In place of the latter, a fair allowance of taste. In lieu of either, the Lamp of Obedience will light the way. A hod-carrier would be wellnigh inexcusable in these days for having an ugly home.

This day of which I spoke — the first after Tom's departure — clouded a little soon after dinner. The afternoon set in rather

drearily. It sprinkled on the windows, which Puella Virginia had just washed. Corona could not walk upon the beach. She wandered out into the kitchen. The kitchen was stained a deep walnut color, with oil and umber; the kitchen tables were shellaced. Puella was scouring tin. Everything looked very clean.

"You shall have a rocking-chair," said Corona; anxious to make the partner of her domestic joys and sorrows as happy as possible.

Puella Virginia thanked her, but said it would kick her shins.

"How would you like lambrequins, and a little seat in the window-sill?" asked Corona. "There are a plenty of bright dark prints to be had for six cents a yard. We can make the kitchen very pretty."

"They 'd grease," said Puella, laconically.

"Perhaps so," said Corona, looking disappointed. She felt uncomfortable with her rugs and her ribbons and her old blue muslin dresses, while Puella's floors and walls.

were bare. Doubtless Corona will be much derided for this hyper-æsthesia of the sympathies. But she could not help it; it was her "way." She had always found it hard to understand the "servants' line" in kindly, comfortable, Christian homes, and was apt to transgress upon it. Besides, in a house twenty feet square the distance between the parlor and the kitchen is so particularly small!

"You're very kind," said Puella, graciously; "but it seems to me, if you're going to do that kind of thing, my room's the place for it."

"Very well," said Corona. "What color shall we get for your room, Puelvir? I will buy the material to-morrow; but you shall select it. You shall have exactly what you want."

"Well," said Puella, after a long and thoughtful pause, "if I can have exactly what I want"—

"Yes," interrupted Corona, eagerly.
"Exactly!"

"Then," said Puella, with a kindling countenance, "I should like them curtains to be maroon and indigo."

"Maroon and indigo!" gasped Corona.

"Two to each window," said Puella, proudly. "I had a cousin once who got married and had some. You never saw anything like the way the maroon fell down onto the indigo. It was so rich! I always said, if I ever got married, I'd have maroon and indigo curtains. It ain't exactly getting married, living out with you," added Puella, reflectively; "but it's enough sight easier work, 'n better wages. And, if I have them curtains, I shan't never regret that I didn't take Pete Baily. Only thing made me hesitate about Pete was when I thought about my cousin's curtains. Now I shall have the curtains, without the plague o' Pete. I'm much obliged to you, Miss Corona; very much, indeed. I'll hem 'em myself."

Corona turned away. She was speechless with mingled emotions. Not for her new

little dainty home and all the kingdom and glory thereof would she have disappointed Puella Virginia now.

But — maroon and indigo!

The storm set in heavily toward night. The sea tossed and the fog settled. seen through silver were blotted out. palette of the beach was blurred. Rirds flew low and whistled restlessly. The new house began to leak. Puella went about very much tucked up as to her skirts, and mopped vigorously beneath the delicate curtains. Idlers fled from the rocks. Zerubbabel — whom, by the way, let me hasten to say, passed by the pet name of Zero in the bosom of his family — Zero came over with the afternoon mail; but no other sign of life attacked the cottage. The fog-bell began to toll.

Corona went out and stood in the back doorway and peered into the summer rain. She heard the water dripping into her empty and warping hogshead, and for the first time completely realized that she was in her own home; that she owned the floor she trod on, the walls that sheltered her, the roof that leaked on her, the rain that fell for her, and the peach-basket into which Puella was putting little sticks to build a little fire in her little parlor grate, by which she should sit with slippered feet alone —

"What's that?" cried Puella Virginia.

It was the expressman, driving furiously through the wet.

VI.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

"He drives," said Puella, "as if he was trying to get away from scarlet fever, or a girl he did n't like."

"He does seem in a hurry," observed Corona. The two women watched him eagerly. It was the first time the expressman had called unexpectedly at the cottage. Corona felt that it was an event. Oddly, too, she remembered at the moment how she had often looked with a certain scorn upon secluded people, who found events in little things. Her scorn had turned to sympathy. One of those transformations of the imagination which experience is continually thrusting upon us, and which increase in number and intensify in character as we pass our first youth, forever from that time

idealized to Corona the arrival of express packages at lonely thresholds on rainy days.

The expressman jumped down, splashing in the mud-puddle — her own mud-puddle, by her own back doorstep. Something jumped after him, splashing too.

- "It's a dog!" cried Puella Virginia.
- "Gracious Jiminy!" said the expressman. "I should think it was a dog. If you'd had the bringing of him from Boston, you'd think it was a dog!"
 - "Why, what did he do?" asked Puella.
- "Do!" cried the expressman. "I'll leave you to find out what he did. I'll leave you to find out what he did n't do. Never was so 'tarnal glad to git rid of a nexpress package in my life. He hain't run away but six times; no he hain't. Nor he hain't bit me but three times; has he? Besides, the blasted critter eat his direction off. Fortunate I had it here, ma'am, with the letter explainin'."
 - "Explaining what?" cried Corona, feel-

ing very much confused and not a little embarrassed.

"Explainin' the dog!" cried the expressman. "There! look at that. That's the way he's waltzed at me ever since we started."

The dog (who was a small, alert tan terrier) began, at this, to perform a series of gyrations about the expressman, who held him by a rope. Gradually both man and puppy became twisted into a closer and tighter and more hopeless embrace, till the dog came, for simple want of tether, breathless to a halt between the expressman's legs.

"There, there!" said Puella Virginia, in the aggravating tone women use to impatient men—the tone of a mother to a refractory boy. "Don't get excited. I'll help ye."

She went out into the rain and untied the dog and brought him into the kitchen. The expressman took immediate advantage of his liberty and splashed away as he had come.

Meanwhile Corona was reading the letter, which was from Tom, and ran:

Dear Co, — This will introduce to you a friend of mine, well-born, well-bred, amiable and unobtrusive, who has kindly consented to relieve for the summer the anxiety which Susy feels regarding your unprotected situation in that solitary place. Confess myself I would prefer not to leave you there without masculine society, and hope you may find in this gentleman all that the heart of Defenseless Woman can wish.

Yours, Tom.

P. S. — His name is Matthew Arnold.

Corona laid down the letter and looked at the dog. If Tom had sent a baby, she would not have been more perplexed. She took him gingerly by the long rope. Matthew Arnold proceeded at once to shorten his tether, doing himself up with a series of jerks against her feet, and producing in Corona rather an acute sense of sympathy with the expressman than any warming of the affections toward himself. But then he came from Tom. So she told Puelvir to give the dog his supper and—whatever dogs wanted; and in a vague and abstract manner retired from the Dog Problem to the little gray parlor. Pretty soon she came out into the kitchen again, and the following conversation took place.

- "How is Matthew Arnold, Puella?"
- " Ma'am?"
- "How is the dog? Is he happy?"
- "He's crazy to get back where he came from, if ye call that bein' happy. Yes."
- "Is he a good watch-dog, do you think, Puelvir?"
- "Think likely. They most generally is, 'nless they sleep too heavy."
- "Oh! Does Matthew Arnold sleep heavily, Puella?"
- "Hain't slept no ways yet. Ben wriggling on the rope round the table-leg ever sence he come. I tripped over him three times, and broke a platter. He keeps runnin' between my feet."

"Puelvir, I had not thought much about it before the dog came; but this is the first night we've been alone down here. Do you mind it? Are you at all afraid, Puelvir?"

"Afraid! Well! Be you?"

"Oh! no. I'm not afraid. Indeed, I never thought of it before. But I didn't know how you felt. You don't think we'd better have a man come in, do you, till we get used to it?"

"A—MAN!!!" Puella dropped her toasting-rack and regarded her mistress with a keen and scornful eye. "What under the canopy—two full-grown women—should want of a man"— But perhaps Puella discerned some genuine uneasiness in Corona's face. She replied more gently, "Do as ye like. I can stand him, if you can."

"We might get Zero," said Corona, a trifle ashamed of herself for the suggestion; but impelled to it by one of those unreasonable gusts of feeling which cally tired women.

know. "We might have Zero. He's only a boy." As if this halved the humiliation.

"Very well," said Puella. "I'll get into my rubber boots and go after him. Don't you fret."

Corona returned to the parlor. The night came on swiftly. It grew very dark. Never on shore had she seen such darkness. Outside of her door there seemed to be a chasm of solid black; the outlines of sky and sea and rock were lost. One step off from the little piazza she dared not take; it was like walking over the Great Gulf Fixed.

Yet the night was pierced merrily by the headlights of a hundred vessels anchored in the bay; and the air was full of sweet power, as if blown a long distance over perfumed lands. The rain, too, grew scanty, and the soul of summer spoke out of the mystery of the dark.

She flung herself into the hammock on the piazza, with her heavy scarlet shawl about her. Faint light from the parlor fell through; she made a spot of color like a dying watch-fire, and knew that she made it, and felt it idly.

- "Where will the critter sleep?" asked Puelvir, suddenly appearing, with Matthew Arnold.
- "Who? Oh! the dog. Well can't he sleep in your room, Puelvir?"
- "He could," replied Puella, in a tone of deep significance.
- "He seems so little to sleep alone," said Corona, sympathetically. "Whee — ee, sir! Come here, good fellow, come." She made her first advances toward the dog timidly. Matthew repelled them with sullen dignity.
- "Where'll the *other* one sleep?" asked Puelvir.
- "Oh! Zero. I had n't thought. Has he come? Let me see! I suppose he must sleep in the spare room. That had n't occurred to me. Well, it can't be helped tonight. Make up the bed with the colored blankets, Puelvir."
- "Well, I did," said Puella. "I didn't suppose there was n't nothin' else to be done.

He's been abed and asleep this hour. He sleeps like the Last Trumpet," added Puella, scornfully. "He's deef too."

"The dog might sleep with him," suggested Corona, ignoring these insinuations. "But we must be sure and make him understand that he is n't to let him loose in the morning."

"I give him a bath," said Puella.

"Gave — Oh! you gave the dog a bath. Very good, Puelvir. Now the next thing is to wake Zero. I hardly like to go into his room. What shall we do?"

The two women stood uncertain upon the stairs. Corona held the light, and Puella held the dog. They consulted in whispers, forgetting that Zero was deaf.

"I s'pose I must do it," said Puella, reluctantly. "But this comes of having menfolks in a woman's house."

Corona acknowledged the deserved rebuke in meek silence; and Puella went into Zero's room, holding Matthew Arnold (who rebelled vigorously) by the back of the neck. Corona modestly sat down with the lamp upon the stairs outside of Zero's door, and listened to the following dialogue:—

"Zero!" Silence.

· "Zero!"

"Ze-ro-o-o! Zero! Zero! Zero! Zero! Land! He's deefer 'n the Recordin' Angel. ZERO!"

"Oh! — Um! Eh?"

"Zero! D'ye hear? He's asleep again. Sleeps like a chockful graveyard. Much use you'd be—Zero!—you'd be if there was burglars. Zero! Sleeps like an idiot asylum. Zero! There. Zero! Here's the little dog. See?"

Zero seemed dimly to assert that he saw.

"He's to sleep with you. See? You're not to let him out in the morning. Not to let the little dog out in the morning! Zero! Do you sense it? There. Well, if he don't, I can't do no more," said Puella.

She came out, panting and exhausted. The door, swollen with the fog, stuck and refused to latch. Matthew Arnold evinced

a strong desire to wriggle out through the crack; but found the attempt hopeless and subsided. Zero slumbered on, and silence settled upon that man-protected house.

Corona woke early. The light was strong. The sun seemed to be bathing in the silent sea. She felt as if she had surprised it. one was astir; the fishermen had drawn their boats scraping over the white sand an hour since, and had become only palpitating spots on the horizon. Faint white opaque forms hung far out upon the open ocean, like congealed breath. They were the reminders of departed and departing fog. Their distance and slightness left a remarkable contrast of brilliance upon the cleanswept water of the bay. Corona felt a bounding sense of escaped gloom as she looked from harbor to horizon. The few birds of the seaside were singing somewhere The opposite arm of the shore curved tenderly about the thoughtful water; the clear-cut colors of cliff and sand, of the forest, and the village, looked over Anchored sails were flung to dry in the golden air; departing sails looked back affectionately, but leaped outward with a thrill; every little fishing-boat was sentient; every gray, grave schooner had a soul. The window by the bed was open, and beyond the blue muslin curtain the broad blue day gazed in. The air was electric and imperious; the world was very good. Corona, in a kind of trance of idleness, possession, and delight, heard feet astir at last, and softly called:—

"Puelvir?"

Puella and a crisp waft of frying cunners came to the foot of the stairs together. There seemed something incredibly poetic to Corona in the fact of having one's own perch for breakfast in one's own house. She turned from the glory of the harbor to the substantial footsteps of Puella without shock. It was all like a change of key in a mystical and joyous German opera. In a dreamy tone she asked Puella if Zero had got up. Puella replied that he had been gone three hours since.

- "And the dog?" asked Corona, idly. "Is Matthew Arnold safe up-stairs?"
- "S'pose so," said Puella. "The creetur was up before I was; waked me up, too."
 - "Which creature, Puelvir?"
- "Why, the boy. I s'pose he left the dog. I never looked to see."
- "Come up and look into the green room, and call him down," said Corona, pleasantly, turning again to the romance of the sea.

In a few minutes Puella presented herself. Her face was grave. She said:—

"Well, he's gone."

"Gone! Have you looked under the bed? In the closet? Under the — No, he could n't get under the bureau. What will my brother say? What shall we do, Puelvir? Is this the way dogs always do? I never had a dog, Puelvir. I don't know what to do. I wonder if they get out windows. Do you think he got out the window? I think you must hunt up Zero. I will dress and help you immediately."

Accordingly, Puella put on her rubber

boots (she was already as dependent on those boots as the Peterkin family), to cross the long, unmown, wet grass, in search of Zero. Corona hurried off as soon as circumstances would permit. She met Puella returning alone, with a string in her hand.

"There's all that is left of him," said Puella, producing the familiar rope by which Matthew Arnold had so won the affections of the expressman. "The creetur says the dog followed him out. Says he seemed to like him first rate. Says he kep' along as nice as could be for a ways, till he see a cart. Guessed he thought it was a nexpress cart. Anyway, the critter put; and the creetur"—

"You confuse me," interrupted Corona, impatiently, — "talking about creeturs and critters. I don't keep track of which you mean. I suppose you mean the boy went after the dog, and could n't find him."

"Well, yes'm," said Puella; "that's about it. Anyway, the dog is gone. And the boy says he never heard nothin' we said to him last night — not nothin'; not one blessed word. He thought it was queer when he

waked up and see the critter sleepin' on the chair beside of him. Says the dog asked to go; so he let him go. Says he never heard nothin'; not nothin'. I told him he'd been useful if we'd been murdered in the night. When you get to be so old as I be, Miss Corona, you won't have so much opinion of men-folks, I dessay. They're well enough in their place," added Puella, drawing her generous figure to its height and speaking with the unconscious patronage of power; "but I don't want 'em too nigh me."

"At least," said Corona, "I can get a revolver."

Puella made no reply. There was one thing — only one — in this world to which Puella objected more than she did to a man. That was a pistol. She had never been afraid of a man; she was very much afraid of a pistol. She would rather have had ten tramps in the house than one Smith & Wesson. But it was not Puella's house; she could not say anything. Even her maroon and indigo curtains failed to make her feel at home just then.

VII.

MARY.

CORONA was going to have company. was her first company; for Tom did not "count." She went about her new home in a fine fever. She patted the house, so to speak, for the coming of her friend. arrangement of the table-linen was a poem. There was romance in the green borders of the towels that hung harmoniously in the green spare room. The carpet-sweeper was not without a charm, and the duster had a certain ideal character. The little brown house absorbed more light from the sun, more soul from the sea, than on lonelier Every fold of every curtain had a davs. hospitable air. Each picture on the matched board walls looked out expectant.

In the superfluity of uncommon names

with which chance had blessed her household, Corona found a singular relief in the fact that her friend was plainly known as Mary. Mary and Corona had not met for a long time. The guest arrived at evening. There was a gate between Corona and the street, which, for some vague reason connected with cows, which Corona never fully understood, had to be kept shut. went out and opened the gate for the omnibus when Mary came. As she did so, Corona heard the sound of some unexpected struggle and excitement, and a figure replete with confused associations bounded to meet her. It was a dog. It was a blackand-tan dog.

"I got him in Boston!" cried Mary, coming in all flushed and fine in her modish traveling-clothes and looking for a moment very strange at the homely little hearth-side where she stood. "I wanted to bring you something. I did n't know what. I met a man trying to sell this dog. He said the fellow plagued his life out following him

round. He said it would n't stay with anybody else, but just stuck to him. He said he was tired of the sight of it. I thought it a pity — such a pretty dog. So I bought him "—

"Bought him!" echoed Corona, impulsively.

"Why, yes. You didn't think I stole him? I bought him of the man; it was an expressman gave it to him. I got him for you, my dear; and I hope you'll love him for my sake!"

"I'm very much — very much, indeed," faltered Corona; "and I certainly will. Come here sir; come here. How kind you were — and thoughtful. And now you'll come directly to your room, I know. This way. This little dog is thirsty. If you'll excuse me"—

She hurried to the kitchen, where she and the dog and Puella confronted each other.

"Well!" said Puella.

[&]quot;Yes," said Corona.

- "It's him," added Puella.
- "It's Matthew Arnold," said Corona, solemnly. "I see you think so. There is no doubt about it. What shall we do?"
- "I know him by them eye-teeth," said Puella, grimly, "and that twist to his tail. He had that cock to one eye, too, when he ran around the table-leg. Yes, it's him."
- "What can we do?" repeated Corona, desperately. "I cannot tell her. How can I? No. We must n't tell her, Puelvir—at present. It seems like deception; but it is n't our fault. We won't say anything about it to her."
- "Nor to your brother, neither. Eh?" asked Puella, sardonically.
- "No," said Corona, groaning; "nor to my brother, either, just yet. Perhaps he won't come while Miss Mary is here. We can trust not. We must make the best of it, Puelvir. Give Matthew Arnold his supper, and tie him in a double bow-knot. And be careful how you look, Puelvir, when anything is said before you about the dog."

And now life in the brown cottage became full of busy restfulness. The days slid by, well comraded. Corona was happier than she had ever expected to be, in her own house or out of it. To be sure, a shadow fell across her content now and then, when Mary reminded her that she was to love that dog for her sake. found it a little difficult at first to call him Launcelot, which was the name Mary had selected for him. Corona suggested Matthew Arnold; but Mary said that was irreverent. Corona inquired if Launcelot were not a little disreputable; but Mary thought not. Sometimes they compromised on Matthew Launcelot. And these were slight matters. And the dog stayed. In fact, he stayed hard. Whatever his unrelated experience during his brief absence in Boston, all the expressmen of Fairharbor could not have won him from Corona's back-door now. He proved to be a reserved, inscrutable character, with no undue amount of intellect, but much repressed affection, with which he honored Corona in an unenthusiastic, but dogged way. Corona yielded to him the swift obedience of love. In short, Matthew Launcelot soon became the master of the house. "And Puelvir is the mistress," Corona would say, when she and Mary wandered away days at a time in the wide June weather, delighted to know that they did not know what they should have for dinner, and scorning to ask what to-morrow's breakfast would resemble.

To-day they scale the great cliffs of the headland, emancipated in beach-dresses; eager to climb for the sheer love of climbing, that, like the love of music, foreign missions, or flirtation, is native to the soul. To-morrow they will have the weeds that burn beneath the morning sun on the rugged eastern beaches, and, gathering them idly, fling themselves upon the rocks to see the third wave rear in — sentient, it seems — a palpitating sea-horse, ramping beneath the bridle of the strong head-wind. And Corona, in a low voice, quotes: —

"Like senseless weeds that rise and fall Upon Thine awful tides; are we No more then, after all?"

Then, sauntering home at sunset, with the tiny corpses of color that one never knows whether it is worth while to save, they gather like children over the white basin that Puella brings, to see the resurrection of the dead. Crimson, olive, corn, and carmine, brown and amber, and the burning green draw breath like souls. And, watching these, they faintly hear the mighty breakers left behind upon the now darkened and deserted shore; and think how large the wave, how small the weed; and think, perhaps, how long is life, how short its summer, how large denial is, how small is joy; and grow a little sentimental as the night comes, and the moon lifts her shoulders over the hill, and so wander to separate windows in the little gray parlor, and sit silent for a while, till the summer people start a merry song upon the beach, or one wanders up to ask, will they join the sailingwaked up and see the critter sleepin' on the chair beside of him. Says the dog asked to go; so he let him go. Says he never heard nothin'; not nothin'. I told him he'd been useful if we'd been murdered in the night. When you get to be so old as I be, Miss Corona, you won't have so much opinion of men-folks, I dessay. They're well enough in their place," added Puella, drawing her generous figure to its height and speaking with the unconscious patronage of power; "but I don't want 'em too nigh me."

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To-day they scale the great cliffs of the headland, emancipated in beach-dresses; eager to climb for the sheer love of climbing, that, like the love of music, foreign missions, or flirtation, is native to the soul. To-morrow they will have the weeds that burn beneath the morning sun on the rugged eastern beaches, and, gathering them idly, fling themselves upon the rocks to see the third wave rear in—sentient, it seems—a palpitating sea-horse, ramping beneath the bridle of the strong head-wind. And Corona, in a low voice, quotes:—

"Like senseless weeds that rise and fall Upon Thine awful tides; are we No more then, after all?"

Then, sauntering home at sunset, with the tiny corpses of color that one never knows whether it is worth while to save, they gather like children over the white basin that Puella brings, to see the resurrection of the dead. Crimson, olive, corn, and carmine, brown and amber, and the burning green draw breath like souls. And, watching these, they faintly hear the mighty breakers left behind upon the now darkened and deserted shore; and think how large the wave, how small the weed; and think, perhaps, how long is life, how short its summer, how large denial is, how small is joy; and grow a little sentimental as the night comes, and the moon lifts her shoulders over the hill, and so wander to separate windows in the little gray parlor, and sit silent for a while, till the summer people start a merry song upon the beach, or one wanders up to ask, will they join the sailingparty? or Zero's mother sends him over with some flowers; or Puella knocks to say that folks are trying to make a call, but Matthew Launcelot is barkin' at the brooch and waltzin' at it till the hosses rared and kicked him and she wished they would.

Or they will visit every lighthouse in the harbor, and talk with every keeper, and hear every story of the great storm, the greater wrecks, the strangling fogs, the enormous desolateness, and the meagre salary of the keeper's life.

Or they will row two miles in the "Gull's Wing" (that is Corona's dory), and wander up and down the opposite harbor shore, in the heart of one of Massachusett's densest forests, to rest the eyes in green and muteness, from the daily splendor of the shadeless, shattered sea.

Or they will get out of something for supper, the day Puella takes her "afternoon," and tilt anxiously upon the rocks for two hours in search of cunners, with their long, unaccustomed, cruel poles; the wind in their faces, the sun in their hearts, the summer in their eyes; and catch just three between them; and, being upon the verge of starvation, fry them savagely for supper; having one apiece, and heroically saving the smallest for Matthew Launcelot.

Or they heard steps upon the rocks last night; or Matthew barked at eleven; or oars dipped across the harbor at three, with a stealthiness that bespoke unusual errands. And the two women, listening breathless, each from her blue or green bedchamber, in the black, defenseless night, heard the unseen boat draw near and nearer to the unseen shore; and thought of foreign sailors — the French, the Spaniard, and the "Portugee" - of all the lawless life that floats into Fairharbor from all quarters of the reckless globe; and say to-day at breakfast that they will not live so any longer, and, without further deference to Puella's superstitions, vow to be accomplished seven-shooters before another evening falls, and will go together to "the city" for that revolver.

"The city" is a mile away. Mary and Corona row over after supper, in the death of the hot day. Matthew Launcelot insists upon accompanying them; and when he gets midway of the burning water is frightened out of whatever wits he has, and does his best to upset the "Gull's Wing," with such efficiency that for one breathless moment Corona's helpless oars fly from the rebellious current, and she sees the colors of her harbor as one sees the face of sudden death, but mainly thinks, What will Mary's mother do?

Mary, however, makes a manful grasp at Matthew Launcelot's palpitating tan throat, and holds him thereafter in a grip more of sorrow than of love, until they land. Matthew Launcelot is uncommonly muddy, and Mary's dress is white.

But yet how wonderful, how wonderful it is! Corona rows peacefully and powerfully after the incident of Matthew Launcelot. The sun sinks. The harbor lights leap out — gold and green and brave blood-red.

The tired fishermen creep home with languid sail. Picturesque old men, with heavy beards, dip their black boats to the gunwale for their lobster-pots, which come up flashing every color in the prism to the level light. Pleasure parties sweep by singing. The waves take on the depths of jewels—tender and terrible; but the sky is like a mighty flower.

As they near the little town, the colors darken and alter impressively. Huge schooners, barks, and ships at anchor block their way. Mary's white hand on the tiller steers skilfully and silently beneath the hot breath of panting steamers. Rough sailors from the crowded decks look down at them with grave and idle interest. Two spring upon the wharf to help the ladies up the narrow ladder, for the tide is low. They lift their hats; and one of them ties the "Gull's Wing," which he promises to watch.

They walk, with swifter steps than perhaps need be, through the throngs of loafers in the narrow streets. There are some hard faces — miserable men! They hang about the rum-shops and the sailors' hells. Nowhere else does Corona see such faces. The two women draw their veils a little, and pass like two tall, shining lilies up the sultry, unclean street. They need not fear.

"There are two things," said a Cape Cod boy, "that a sailor will give his life for, will die to defend. One is a beautiful vessel; the other a delicate lady."

Matthew Launcelot accompanied them, walking gravely through the crooked, busy streets, to the revolver shop. The revolver shop was a jeweler's.

"Know how to shoot?" asked the jeweler.

"Oh! no," said Corona, calmly; "but you can teach me."

The jeweler did not seem so sure of this, but kindly gave the lady a few instructions. He was more amused than Corona could see reason for being. She took her pistol and her lesson, however, and hurried away, triumphant. As they left the store, coming

out into the now lighted and showy little town, drops struck their faces,

"It's beginning to rain!" cried Mary.

"If I've got to row home in a blow," said Corona, "we cannot take this dog. He might be too much for you to hold, if it is rough. I think he must be sea-sick, he acts so. What shall we do?"

"I should send him home by — something," suggested Mary, vaguely.

"He might go by the omnibus," said Corona.

The omnibus was passing. So Matthew Launcelot went home by land.

"Lost your dog, eh?" asked the polite sailor, when he untied the boat.

"Why, I'd have rowed you over, dog and all. You'd ought to learn him. A dog has to be learned to be a sailor, like folks. Mine'll climb the riggin' now, well as me, most. Fust time I took him to the Banks, he was so sick we had to set up nights with him. I'd pull pretty well, if I was you. It's comin' up a breeze of wind."

It was, indeed. Corona, pushing out into the harbor, found that the glory of the hour had gone. Clouds flew low, like great birds, and seemed to flap their dense gray wings. The water had grown ominously dark. The mouth of the harbor gaped, and its throat lay yellow and livid - an ugly look - from shore to shore. The waves began to rise. They took on veils of brown and purple-Corona rowed hard. black. She rowed hard, but the wind helped her, for the shower lay in the northwest and chased her on. In the gloom and opacity of sky and sea and shore Mary's dress and her slender fingers looked singularly white and transparent, and seemed to light the way. The sailors in the schooners, as the "Gull's Wing" shot by, looked over a little anxiously, it seemed, this time. One old fisherman, who crossed them, clinging to his furling, flapping sail, said, audibly, to his boy at the tiller. -

"Them gals had better look out."

Corona rows steadily. Once in a while

she thinks of Mary's mother. But she is not at heart afraid. She and the "Gull's Wing" have taken too many a wild flight together. She sees the flying shore, the crowding cloud, the electric harbor throat, exultantly. She is in them, of them. She thrills with kinship to them; she quivers with the passion of the sea.

And now the Light, the reef, the buoy, the Neck, the Cut, the red buoy, and the Cove plunge by. Drops are on the water two miles off upon the other shore. The low brown cottage looks through the spray of the deep and angry waves, into whose heart the "Gull's Wing" strikes right rovally. There are a few long strokes, a few quick breaths, and swift between the teeth of the rocks the dory makes her haven. A great wave carries her high and dry upon the sand. Drops hit Corona sullenly as she stands, wind-blown and flushed, in her blue boating-dress, to moor the boat, hand over strong hand, by the pulley mooring. Suddenly the two women feel the power of the

wind upon them. They bend their heads and run.

It is dark in the cottage. Puella is shutting doors and windows. Matthew Launcelot, offended by his aimless and anxious omnibus ride, retreats to a northern window and eyes the storm, but is not conversational. It is very dark outside.

Now the shower comes fast. Across the bay's width drops step and hasten. One can see them coming like feet. Before one thinks of this, they are the footsteps of an army. The sultry color of the harbor's mouth turns black. Then comes the downpour. It is not like rain. It is a sheet of white light. It falls slantwise, blown by the gale. The rocks are frosted by the wet, and glitter; and then they give out all the light there is. Out in front of the cottage the "Gull's Wing" tears at her tether, plunging out of sight in the bosom of the wave.

VIII.

HOUSE-WARMING.

"I THINK," said Corona, one day, "that we must give a party."

"I would," said Mary, warmly. "The shore is well filled now. People could easily drive over. There are the Burtons at Wolchester, and Effie Purchase. There is General Dolburn at Gride's Farm, and the Hopkinsons and the Allisons and some of that set. And at Dove's Cote"—

"Some time," interrupted Corona, "I want to see all those people at my house; but not now, not first. There are others I want to begin with. I want to ask the Ranns and the Fishers, and Mrs. Jacobs and Miss Thurston, and — let me see! Oh! and Mr. Morrison and some others."

"Morrison? Thurston?" asked Mary,

blankly. She did not know these friends of Corona's. Thurston was a distinguished name.

"The Ranns," continued Corona, calmly, "live on the hill, in that gambrel-roofed old house. They catch fish. The Fishers sell it, in that brown hut we passed yesterday. Mrs. Jacobs does fine washing for the summer boarders. Miss Thurston works in the net factory. Then there is my dear Mrs. Rowin. She is Zero's mother. Old Mr. Morrison is our lobster man."

There was a silence. Mary took up Matthew Launcelot and addressed some irrelevant remarks to him, which Matthew received with small favor; but which served as an outlet to Mary's emotions. Even great failures have their great uses.

"I thought, dear," she said, at last, pathetically, "that I was prepared for you almost anyhow. But I was not. I am not. Well. When will you have your party?"

"These people are my neighbors," said Corona, earnestly. "I have come to live among them. I have no others, except the boarders, who don't stay. They seem more like land-sparrows than they do like neighbors. I always thought, if one had a house, one would regard one's neighbors first. I have chosen mine. I shall abide by my choice. Besides," added Corona, "I like these people. I want them in my house."

"I've no doubt they are excellent people," urged Mary, hastily; "and certainly, dear, if you wish to do it, I will help you all I can."

"I shall ask Tom and Susy," added Corona. "And Effic Purchase may come, if she wants to. But no one else. Too many people spoil a house-warming. Let us have it the last week in July."

Mary was silent. She did not like to say that she hardly thought Elf would come.

On one point they differed. Mary thought it necessary to christen the cottage before they gave a party.

Corona could not think of any name that she was willing to call the cottage by. She was not sure that she liked cottages with names.

"It is a snobbish American fashion," she said. "Half of the shoddy places in the country are called Wildbriars and Willowbanks, and Lilybells, and such things. This is a matched board cottage. I think I will call it the shanty."

"The châlet would be pretty," suggested Mary.

"Why not the Robin Redbreast?" asked Corona, severely. "Or, The Tea-chest? It's square. Or, The Fog-bank? It's dark enough. That will do. The Northeast Fog-bank."

Mary said she had meant something not exactly so serious; something a little funny.

"The Oyster-Shell. Or, The Lobster-Pot. Or, The Clam-bake," replied Corona.

"Well, no," said Mary. "But how would you like the Maiden's Repose, for instance?"

"I will call it the Old Maid's Paradise," said Corona, after some thought. "That will do. 'Presents her compliments, and

would be happy to see you in Paradise.'
Yes. I will consent to the Old Maid's Paradise."

The last week in July came in swift season, and with it the day appointed for Corona's party. With it, too, came Tom; with it Susy and the baby (whom Corona did n't ask): with it also Miss Purchase of Wolchester. With it a placid harbor and a windless east; the south breeze cooled across miles of water for burning inland cheeks; the sky at rest, the tide at the full, and the last wild roses flaring on the soft gray color of the big bowlder and in the thicket by the gate. Effie Purchase said they looked like torches. She said she never saw anything so delightful. And Susy kissed Corona often; but Tom kissed her twice. Corona was happy. When she found that everybody treated her party with respect, she was very happy.

And Mary helped Puella with the cake.

"It's just one of her ways," said Puella to Mary, as they rolled the frosting. "It ain't so much havin' the folks. I don't mind that. That's well enough, if she wants 'em. The house is hern, and the neighbors set by her to be uncommon kind when we first come down. But what I can't consider is wastin' cake like this here you call French kisses on them that'll never know it took the whites of one dozen eggs to a single receipt. And whatever am I to do with the yolks, in a house where none of ye will set eyes on custard-pudden, nor yet on pies?"

Corona's cottage looked pleasant to the twenty guests, who came strolling up by twos and threes, prompt to the early country hour of their invitation. To them there was a certain mystery about this Lilliputian hospitality. The tiny house was not as large as some of the homes from which they came. But there were no tall ferns standing in tall vases on their piazzas, and the wild briar and woodbine, the red rose-seeds, and the delicate cranberry-vines that wreathed the posts and door had a perplex-

ing, festive look. They had not thought of cranberries in relation to their capacities for household art decoration. And wild roses principally multiplied and eat out the grass. So with the Chinese lanterns on the bowlder and veranda, and on the parlor ceiling, where they shed a softened and transforming light upon the happy faces, upturned to wonder if they smoked the walls.

"She must have give twenty-five cents apiece for them," thought old Mr. Morrison.

"Father Morrison," said Corona, coming up just then (it was one of the pretty customs of Fairharbor to call the old men father; and Corona stood with a certain reverence, in her plain light silk dress, before the seated figure of the old fisherman),—"Father Morrison, can't you tell us something of the great gale of '39? My friends from home want to hear about a great gale."

"Well," said the old man, after a pause and without rising, "don't know but I

could. But I ain't no gret of a talker. I'm a man of few words. But I saw the gale. Yes! I was a boy then. I was thirty years old."

Tom came up with Susy. And Elf Purchase brought the sailor, whom she was entertaining with a candid charm and sweetness that the young fellows in "society" at Wolchester had never seen upon her pretty face. Elf brought up her sailor, and sat on a divan near the old man's feet to listen. It is perhaps mal apropos to talk about "divans" in Corona's house, since, in truth, I mean by that, in this instance, to say a soap-box stuffed with excelsior and covered with what Corona called "green turkey red." But Mary corrected her, saying it was "turkey green."

"It come up o' Sunday," said Father Morrison, looking off over Elf's young head with blank, far-seeing eyes. "It come up o' Sunday, in Jenooary — no, in December — and it blew till Tuesday steady. It blew like all possessed till Tuesday night. Nobody

could stop it, nor help it, nor do nothin' to Nobody can't with a breeze o' wind. That's where a breeze o' wind is different from most other trials that the A'mighty sends on us, his critters. I was ashore; but my father and my brothers — two on 'em was afloat. They just got in and anchored - there. Zero, stand out and let this young woman (pointing to Miss Effie) see where. They was in the same pickle with the rest. There was over eighty vessels in. Darsen't stay out. Could n't get in. It blew 'em agin t'other shore, for it come from the sou'-sou'east. Well, I don't know's I've much to tell. Only I stood on shore. My wife was with me, and she held the baby. My brother's wife was there too — the married one — and his baby. She cried and took on, for we could see 'em drag their anchor. Lots of them dragged their anchor. Some just swamped. Some drifted to Long Beach. It was freezin' cold and the riggin' was slippery as he-, as slippery. My brother's wife was a young thing, and sot & sight by him. We see him clingin' to the riggin'. There warn't no boat could live to stir to 'em. Fifty vessels went down in that there gale, sir, right in this harbor; and fifty men was drowned. My father was among 'em, and the boys—both the boys. We could see 'em droppin' off.

"Wednesday it calmed down," added Father Morrison, after a silence which no one broke, "and I took the widder home. I had her an' the young one to look to. had six of my own. It come hard. Then there was mother. Goin' home to tell her was the worst. And I hed her to keep, too. But we got along. It was a great while ago. Things seem easier when they happened so long ago, young lady. That's a curious thing. You don't understand it; but sea-folks do, such a sight of things keep happenin' to 'em. Sea-folks have to understand a good many things, in my opinion, that the Lord thought land-folks had n't got the wit to see into. So he never called it of 'em. No, he did n't. No, no."

"You have had a hard life, sir. Would you like to live ashore, then?" asked Elf, thoughtfully. She lifted her porcelain profile nearer to the old man's granite face. She had on something transparent and white. Her breath came with some timidity. She looked like an ideal questioning a fact.

"Live ashore!" cried Father Morrison.
"Live ashore! When I come in for my buryin', young woman, I s'pose I must—Yes, yes, yes. I take it I've got to live ashore a while then. So long as I can handle an oar or push a dory off, no shore for me."

"If it's nothin' but lobsters," added Father Morrison, reflectively, "and you've been too old for the Banks this some time sence; yes, ef it's nothin' but lobsters, I'd rather die a lobsterer — yes, yes, I'd rather die a lobster — than live a landlubber. Yes, yes, yes."

Susy, on the piazza, had the cranberry vines in her hand just then. She was talk-

ing to Miss Thurston. Miss Thurston was a large, lonely, homely woman, with the anxious eyes that Susy noticed most of the women in Fairharbor seemed to have. Susy was saying how beautiful were the cranberry vines. She had never seen any before. She swept the long, delicate, curving fronds through her delicate fingers, as she spoke.

"I work in the net factory," said Jane Thurston, impulsively, glancing at her own heavy, toil-cut fingers. "I don't have much time to think if things are pretty. There's a good many pretty things in this house. I like to look around. Miss Corona is so neighborly! I never saw cranberries used for trimmings before."

"None of us have, I think," said Susy, gently.

"We pick 'em to sell," said Miss Thurston.

"Are they — Does it pay for the trouble?" asked Susy, hesitatingly.

"We give him a half. We get a half for picking. He's the man that owns the

meadow. I s'pose he's a right to his propertv. like other folks. I'm not findin' fault. It's children do it mostly: but women-folks don't have any too many ways of earnin'. Mis' Rowin and I and some other ladies go out once in a while. I go after I get home from the factory, of a Saturday. We make a little. It's such uncertain work in the net factory. They don't run winters. Then spring and fall, when the fleets come in, we're drove so. The men come with their nets broke, and are in a hurry to get mended up. Sometimes we work very late. I get four dollars a week. I'll show you over the factory, with pleasure, if you'd like to see it. Most of the girls are vounger than me. Most of them get married after a while. Some of 'em pack salt cod instid."

"It's a hard life for a woman living by the sea," said Susy, softly.

"It's dreadful being a woman by the sea," said Jane Thurston, impetuously, beneath her breath.

"Ten years ago," said Corona to Susy, afterward, "that poor soul had a lover. Yes! You would n't think it. He was lost in a fog at the Grand Banks the week they were going to be married. And then she says, it's so much worse if they do marry. It is no uncommon thing here for all the men in a family to be swept off within a few years. That Mrs. Rann, Tom entertained so nicely, lost her husband and four sons in one gale."

"What a dismal place to live in!" cried Susy. Corona made no answer. She did not think so. At any rate, her little party was not dismal. She watched the quiet pleasure of her guests with a certain vanity of possession. She rejoiced in their keen She was wit and fine, observant eyes. proud of their ease and gentle dignity, their sturdy self-respect, their patience under sorrow, their courage in denial, their almost unbounded generosity to each other, and their well-developed trust in Heaven. the traits which she knew so well in them

seemed to her to shine behind their holiday clothes and manners. She wondered if her friends did not envy her such neighbors. She helped Zero to ice-cream with the finest thrill of hospitality that Paradise had experienced yet. She would have found it difficult to say what she thought when, looking over, she saw Elf Purchase — hovering like a bird in her thin dress — breaking bon-bons with Father Morrison in the corner, and Jane Thurston, laughing, looking on; Mrs Rowin examining the Venetian views; and Charley Rann showing Jenny Fisher the illustrated "Rab," pointing out the striking resemblance between that hero and Matthew Launcelot, while Jenny turned the leaves to. see if Ailsie died. Corona had theories of her own about "society," which she seldom or never saw in practice and of which she did not often talk. To-night she thought about them a little; but the tears came, and she had to stop. So she asked Zero to tell them about the sea-serpent.

"He was discovered off my rocks," said

Corona. "It was in 1817 — my first season." And nobody but old Father Morrison saw her modest joke. But he laughed till Zero had finished the story, and the "Serpent" was well out of the Harbor, after a three weeks' visit.

"I always like to be with good folks," said Father Morrison, standing in the doorway to say good-night. "I like to see good folks. Misery loves company."

When the party was over, and Corona's good neighbors were going away, she and Tom, Susy, Mary, and Elf stood at the gray parlor windows. There was faint moonlight on the bowlder; on the grass over which the people were passing quietly; on the lonely street up which they strolled to their poor homes; and on the terrible sea by which they lived and in which (God knew!) they might be buried. Far out upon the headland the great red Light stood to watch them, standing with clasped arms between them and that which lay beyond. The few fortunate people in the cottage watched

them, too, till they had passed from sight. No one spoke at first. By and by Mary said the sea was rising, and that there was a fog-horn out beyond the bar.

Late that evening there was a knock at Corona's door. It was Tom. She admitted him, wondering; and he sat down in the deck-chair (Corona slept in the parlor that night), and idly drawled:—

"There seems to be—a little confusion in this family about—that dog. Miss Mary says"—

Oh! the dog. Corona had never remembered him till that moment. It was a dreadful moment. She faced it as well as she could. There was nothing for it but to tell Tom the whole story.

"Never again," finished Corona, "will I do anything in the world — if it is only to button my boots, Tom, dear — on the ground that people will never know it. So far as my experience goes, people always find out everything; everything that ever happens.

I'm glad they do. I'd rather they would. I don't want anything that the whole world can't find out, and welcome. But, Tom, darling, I didn't know what to do; and I thought you wouldn't come (you don't often, you know); and Mary said to love him for her sake"—

Such roars of laughter interrupted Corona, that Paradise shook. Susy called to know what on EARTH - And Matthew Launcelot was so disturbed, that Puelvir told him if he did n't stop that barkin' and waltzin' she'd sell him to the Raspberryman. For reasons known only to herself. the most direful threats in which Puelvir ever indulged concerned the Raspberryman. He was held over Matthew Launcelot's head like ghosts over refractory children by unamiable nursery-maids. The Raspberry-man was a gentle, inoffensive man, extremely kind to Matthew Launcelot. But he was also extremely kind to Puelvir.

IX.

HALF-MAST.

THE summer is going fast, like youth, first love, or hot waffles.

Elf Purchase gives utterance to this daring and dignified sentiment, one silver morning. Elf has stayed on after the party. Two guests at a time constitute the wildest dissipation in Paradise. When Elf first came, she quoted—

"Only two in the Garden walked,
And with snake and scraph talked"—

and felt a little in the way, as the serpent must himself, she said, to begin with. But to stay in Fairharbor is as easy as sinning. Effic stayed. To-morrow she can stay no longer. Mary and Corona, Puelvir and Matthew Launcelot will celebrate her last day among them. What shall they do?

As I said, it is a silver day. At least, it is a silver morning.

The fog-bell has tolled all night. In the bursting of the dawn it is tolling still. I should not say this, either; for the dawn cannot burst in a fog. It steals, it sifts, it saturates; it scintillates by and by. Elf watches it luxuriously from the Old Maid's Paradise, turning idly on the pillows, with the muslin curtain pushed and thrust behind her, like a fragment of the fog itself. Elf is young and happy. She is sure the fog will lift. She calls out, merrily:—

"Girls! Oh! girls! We'll have a moonlight row. I'll row. That's what we'll do to celebrate."

Mary asks if they shall begin that minute; but Elf hardly hears the severe rejoinder.

The fog does not lift like this at Gride's Farm or Wolchester. She is passionate with ecstasy. She is swept into the feeling of the morning. Her young eyes impetuously summon the hidden world.

Slowly now, then more swiftly, to her sweet autocracy it comes obedient. huge gray, dense, depressing mass on which she looks lightens imperceptibly at first, and with inimitable delicacy - more like the change of color on a girl's brow than like any other transformation that we know. Flushes of gold, silver, crystal, and of gold again, shoot over the illuminated mist. palpitates with life. The chilly gray has quite gone, like a body slipping from a soul. Still, as yet nothing is to be seen — nothing but the mystery of struggling day. the old miracle re-wrought. Darkness was upon the face of the waters. But God said: "Let there be light." As one watches, the deepening color heaves gently, like a woman's breast. Who but a woman could battle so with Fate to keep her veil about her? See how mute she stands, but haughty too, defended with a sweet defiance! And now how graciously, with what a glamour will she yield! For the time has come; the sun exists; the morning is imperious.

And now a beautiful transparence strikes and stirs the veil which was fog, which was mist, which was light, which was color, which is no longer any of these, but a garment of spun glass, for a queen to wear at her crowning. And, quivering behind it, the young world lifts her head.

There is color now upon the sky; upon the green, reluctant shore; upon the dripping cliffs, that are ruddy and rich of hue. These show themselves in moods at first, uncertainly. Slender outlines of the tallest masts pierce through. Then the sails gray, black, tan-color, and spotless white define themselves, shading, as if hit with a huge blender, from dark to light. Overhead are lakes and pools of burning blue. The Harbor is alive with vessels. They turn their heads, and step out confidently into the still lingering mists. They appear and disappear mysteriously as they go. The waves touch the feet of the cliffs with a gentle sound. The water will be clean and clear. The wind is low; the sun is

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high; and now clouds flit, but the mist is gone. Only still from beyond the Great Red Light, that has watched all night, the fog-bell strikes the warning of the off-shore fog no harbored eye can see.

"It gives me a singular feeling always," said Mary, "to hear that bell tolling on a perfectly clear day."

"It is not clear to the bell," replied Corona. "Safe people do not see dangers."

"If you moralize, I shall take the noon train," said Effie.

"A silver morning is apt to make a gray day," pursued Corona, dreamily, from the hammock on the piazza. "Oh! tell me what is there like it? I think it would be impossible to be wicked or restless or miserable or rebellious, on a gray day in Fairharbor."

Corona was right about the gray. Nothing could possess a calmer charm. The gray days are the mesmerists of sea and summer. The soft, gradual disappearance of the vivid sheets of blue above has a cer-

tain mystery, like the concealment of another ocean, "the waters that are above the waters" still remaining. The hot, direct power of the sun is slowly baffled. The occupants of Paradise steal out at first well protected as from a fire which they do not find; for, suddenly, as they stand clustered under their bright umbrellas and shade-hats, to dare the morning glare upon the white cliff, there is no sun to dare. Soft clouds, pearl and ash color, are running into each other's arms. The heavens are a tender shield above them. The feminine mood of the receptive and reflective water turns swiftly pale and neutral. The rocks take a deeper hue upon their steel and iron cheeks. Dark shadows creep along the fresh-cut and no longer brilliant grass. Shapes of shadows, too, pursue each other up and down the beach, left broad by the retreating tide. Sea and shore and sky are full of "middle tones." Only the unaccustomed eye could call this the negation of color. To the lover of the gray days, the repression and the passion and the power of tint and shade are intense.

The three women doff their useless hats, and, with foreheads bare to the low, keen, eastern wind, wander away the morning long, over the beach, the hill, the Point, the rich and rugged shore, getting themselves as much tanned as possible - "to keep up the values of the picture," Elf said. Even Matthew Launcelot approves the absence of the August sun, and seems to extend a dignified recognition of its courtesy to Heaven, though plainly feeling it no more than he deserves. He looks over Mary's shoulder with a critical air when she flings herself down in the great huckleberry pasture on the ridge, to read what Byron and Celia Thaxter, Wordsworth, Barry Cornwall, and Jean Ingelow will say about the sea. Matthew Launcelot was in some haste to accompany the ladies this morning, for Puelvir said the Raspberry Man was driving down the road. Matthew Launcelot proves himself peculiarly skilled in eating huckleberries off the bush. This exciting incident delights the little company. Who would think of anything more grave to-day? Wordsworth and Jean Ingelow may stay in the thicket, and be "intense" and "earnest" by themselves.

The gray day does not live long. In its stead there begins to creep up into the huckleberry pasture, a soul and a sense unknown till now to the August shore. Elf cries that this is a new page in the Poem of Fairharbor, and she will never go home till she has found out what it means.

"It means the Indian Summer, by and by," said Corona, slowly.

The wind has shifted a little. It trembles from the southeast to the south. There is still a dash of salt in the air; but the air and the dash are gentle. The gray day has grown gold as Florida. Up here on the hill, it seems peculiarly, pungently sweet, and the Harbor, lying below, seems to be blossoming and odorous, like a foreign flower they have never seen before. A

breath of fog exhales from one knows not where — thin, warm, and shifting; scarce enough to jog the fog-bell gently now and then.

"As if it were calling the sailors to dinner," suggests Elf; "but usually I think it is burying them all."

The water as she speaks becomes bright

— a blur of light. It is too bright to be
watched. Down on the rocks, ladies in red
jackets lie reading lazily beneath Japanese
umbrellas. The wind strengthens. Even
Celia Thaxter's pages will not keep their
poise in Mary's hands; for Mary will begin
to read, and Elf will walk, and Corona will
go with her. Even Matthew Launcelot
partakes of an extra course of blueberries,
for the day has struck a key to which the
nerve must start and vibrate.

The cattle browsing on the Point are cut clear against the sky. The beach is still bare and warm. Shoreward the water is a vivid green. At times the sky and sea have an indefinite, achromatic appearance, neither

blue nor gray nor white. A mullein at Corona's feet has died, and stands brown, stiff, sere, and stark against the perspective of the Point. Flocks of swallows beat the air. They are flying southward. They settle on the roofs of Mr. Fisher's barn, on Mrs. Rowin's dead cornfield, on the rigging of the little yacht the summer people have anchored off the Cove.

Far down, the "Gull's Wing" moves musingly about her mooring, with the skiff at her side. The skiff looks like a baby. The dingy city, too, seen from this height, looks small and far and fair. The fishermen's homes have a certain radiance in the idealizing air. The Old Maid's Paradise seems to nestle confidingly against the summer sky.

Corona, beneath her breath, says "There is time yet, time yet," as they clamber down the hill, and wade the yellow sand of the upper beach, and leap the stone walls that everybody, including the picturesque cattle, feels at liberty to tumble down and cross,

and so come slowly home, to find Puelvir's chowder as perfect as her temper, though the dinner-bell rang wildly toward the hill an hour since.

Ah! then, how luxurious the colors of the shaded, silent house. Delicious to get out of hot beach-dresses and down into the surf before the chowder, and come to dinner with undried hair for which no one shall apologize, and, in the unbelted white wrapper, or the cool and dainty dressing-sacque, wander about the free, delightful, manless house.

"How perfect to be three women — to be four women by yourselves!" cries Elf.

The fog does not return with the afternoon; but the golden weather lives. There is a moon to-night, after all. Elf can have her row.

The "Gull's Wing" is drawn in, after the early tea, and comes leaping over the full tide, between the rocks, impatient to be gone. Matthew Launcelot is unanimously left at home. Puelvir comes down to help

them off. She stands, gaunt and strong, against the sky, as the boat bounds out, obedient to her mighty push. The delicate women look small to her, as she looks down. She thinks how fine the sky, and that the dishes are not done. She thinks Miss Corona's beach-dress must be washed next week, and that the Harbor has a pretty look against the light-house reef. Perhaps she wonders what it would be like, if somebody else were to "do" the tea-things on pleasant nights. Perhaps her imagination takes a high flight, and in a dream of ecstasy she sees herself sailing, by moonlight too, in her best bonnet, with the Raspberry Man.

The boat bounds out.

Puelvir, when the dishes are done, sits faithfully, behind her maroon and indigo curtains, to watch it, lest it overset. Matthew Launcelot sits beside her. He, too, watches the boat. Now and then he runs his tongue out swiftly, and in again, in an embarrassed way, peculiar to Matthew Launcelot when suffering from disappointed

aspiration. He makes no other comment upon the fact that he and Puelvir were not wanted.

"The sky," says Puelvir, presently, aloud, "looks like them old-fashioned Chiny pinks."

Matthew turns his head, confidingly, far upon one side, to hear her. He is not sure whether he understands Puelvir.

And still the boat bounds out powerfully; for Elf does not row very long. When she has all but twice upset the "Gull's Wing," cracked a blade, lost a thole-pin, and trailed her overskirt pathetically through the shining water, she relinquishes the oars to Corona's practiced grasp. The sun is going, and the Lights come out. Already the moon lies pale, with her chin upon the hill. But between her and the waiting Harbor still rest the flushes of the sky.

"I never can talk when the sky is pink," observes Elf. And Mary, leaning languidly against the stern, clasps her hand behind her head, and quotes, beneath her breath:

"A rose-cloud dimly seen above,
Floating through heaven's blue depths away;
O sweet, fond dream of human love,
For thee I may not pray."

"Why, Mary!" says Corona, softly. "I did not know anybody in the world but myself said that, when the sky is this color."

"Why, I always have!" cries Elf, "ever since I was a little girl. I thought everybody did. I thought it was a general way of praying — like a litany."

But now the rose has faded, and soft brown tints steal over the bay. Every ship has a shadow. Every shadow leans to the western shore. Dim forms of sailors on the dimmer rigging make unseen preparations for a night of safety and of sleep. Pleasure-boats glide by most quietly. A faint light (of which Mary notices that it is tinted like the tear-vessels of Cyprus, and will ask nobody's pardon, since Elf said that the sunset was like a Turner), a thin light begins to touch the mainmasts of the tall schooners and the forehead of the headland nearest to

the unsheltered sea. It is the hour of the moon.

Still Corona rows steadily, and the boat bounds out. She rows against the wind. They will come home easily. Nobody is afraid, though the line of schooners thins a little and the sailing-parties have all drifted They row in a path of flame and will follow the mounting moon. The shores look denser on either hand because of the glory in which they glide. Yet a wonderful distinctness touches certain details. roof of the Old Maid's Paradise glitters sharply, and Elf declares she can see the last wild roses on the bowlder, and asks, as if in confirmation of her statement, what sight on earth so delicate as a wild rose seen beneath the moon? And now they approach the Great Red Light.

There is something so impressive in the vicinity of this Light, that they cannot talk about it. Corona lifts her sparkling oars, and the three women drift for a while in silence at its solemn feet, between the haven

and the deep. Presently, in a sweet voice, to a low, monotonous air, Elf begins to sing:

"Away! away! till the shore dies out,
Till the waves and the stars are around us only!
On to the bounds of the outermost space,
Where the shades of the Ancient Night sit lonely,
Alone on the terrible waste with God!
The broad waves stretch where the sight dies aching,
And the stars swing like lamps in the Judgment Hall
On the eve of the Day of the Last Awaking!

"We shall tread no more on the hills of earth,
We shall look no more upon earth-worn faces;
Loves and hopes that were ours shall find
Deeper than lead sinks, burial-places.
We will ride like gods in the white moonlight,
While the old sea heaves with a fierce endeavor
To break the bonds that have made him ours.
Oh! the sea is ours, is ours forever!"

As the last, long, exultant notes die upon the shining air, Corona utters a swift exclamation and pulls sharply on her larboard oar.

A terrible shadow looms above them. An instant, and they had struck a huge old fishing schooner that is coming in. They look up at her timidly. The "Gull's Wing"

quivers in the ripple from her mighty sides. The color of the vessel is black. Her sails are dingy and old. She is heavily weather-beaten. Her crew, seven or eight in number, cluster on her deck. They are singularly silent, Corona thinks. As the prow steps solemnly by and glides away, the vessel's name shows distinctly, beneath the moon.

Elf begins to sing again, lightly this time:

"A sailor's wife a sailor's star should be!"

But Corona interrupts her, with an awestruck cry:

"Oh, girls! Oh, hush! Look there!"
She points upward, where in the shadow
the flag hangs low above the perfectly silent
crew.

"The flag," whispers Corona, "is at half-mast."

But Elf and Mary do not understand.

"They put it at half-mast when somebody is dead. They have come home from the Banks, and left one of the boys behind, See! How still they are! They will sail like that the length of the Harbor. And—people are watching—to see them come in. And—for a while nobody can tell which it is. Only that one is gone! Oh! girls, let us go home!"

They turn and drift toward home. The black vessel keeps still beyond them, carrying her speechless crew. Corona moors the "Gull's Wing," and the three women go into the blessed cottage, which sends no dear one down to the terrible sea in ships. They think: There, indeed, is Paradise, where death is not.

Out in the moonlight the vessel keeps on her solemn way. Watchers on shore come to the rocks with glasses, to read her name, it is so light.

It is not till morning that the message comes from poor little Zero, who tries to play with Matthew Launcelot, but finds that is a thing which cannot be done when fathers die.

Puelvir puts a white face through the re-

luctant door of the happy blue bedroom, and, hesitating and stammering with her usually clear words, she says:—

"Miss Corona, dear, the 'Ella B. Rowin' come home last night at half-mast; but she left the mate — at Georges — in the fog. Folks told her so sudden — they had ought to be — ought to be — sold — to the Raspberry Man! She was helpin' Miss Jacobs, for she was overdrove on a frilled petticoat for a lady up to the hotel, and it was late. This man come in and told her: 'Your husband's drowned at Georges' — just like that. She's been that bad all night she talks of you consider'ble, and the boy says his sister says: Won't you come over right away?"

ZERO.

"I THINK," said Corona, one day, "that it is time I practiced a little with my revolver."

Corona's family received this announcement with doubtful cordiality. Mary said she didn't know, and Puella's emotions were so much for her that she left the dining-room silently. Do we credit the servant behind our chair with the amount of self-control required not to comment upon our conversation, reply to our rebuke, or retort upon our temper, injustice, or suspicion? Perhaps one third of the reticence and self-possession which we require of the kitchen would keep the parlor in goodnature for a generation.

Puella, as I say, made no remarks about

the pistol, and Corona proceeded to put her intent into execution.

With some inward trepidation, but extreme outward calm, she brought down the revolver and examined it. It proved to be uncommonly rusty. Corona had a vague impression that rusty revolvers kicked. She accordingly withdrew her unused cartridges by a slow and laborious process peculiar, I think, to herself, consisting mainly of sharp dabs and sidelong applications of a darning-needle, much denting of her soft finger-tips, and much peering over the muzzle, to see how many balls were left to push out.

Mary suggested that this method of unloading was not unattended with danger, and proposed that they send for Zero. In vain Corona inquired of what use could Zero be. Zero was a man—at least, he would be, ten or a dozen years hence; therefore, he must know about pistols. True, by the time Zero was obtained, Corona had her pistol neatly (if unscientifically) emptied, oiled, cleansed, and reloaded; but Mary felt safer.

"There is one trouble," observed Corona, as Mary and Zero came up. "I don't seem to have any target down here. As soon as I take aim, somebody comes and sits on a rock just within range. I narrowly escaped murdering two children, three nurses, an old gentleman, and Mrs. Rowin's cat, since you went away. The cat was with the fishing party, and watching for the perch as they came off the hook. Then, whenever I do fire, Matthew Launcelot runs directly there, to see what it is. He thinks it is a spool, or something to be played with. It is very trying."

"You ken take me," said Zero.

"Take you!"

Corona meditated on this proposal, uncertain whether it contained any latent irreverence. Zero stood regarding the pistol with the listless motion and uninquisitive gravity common to the shore boys, and increased by Zero's infirmity.

"Yes," said Zero. "Take me for a target. I'll resk it."

"You may go into the house," said Corona, severely, "with Miss Mary. I do not wish anybody around while I practice."

Zero obeyed, still without a smile. Mary obeyed with alacrity. She and Zero shut the front door.

"Is Puelvir in?" called Corona.

Yes, Puella was in, quaking.

"Call in Matthew Launcelot," cried Corona. "Lock in Matthew Launcelot. I'm going to shoot at the house. I wish you'd all go into the kitchen and shut every door. I shall aim," added Corona, with dignity, "at the lowest step, from a spot seven feet down the cliff. I cannot hit you. Don't be afraid. The steps themselves are at least eight feet high. I wish you'd tie Matthew Launcelot."

Corona's directions were fully obeyed. Mary, Puella, Zero, and the dog gathered in the kitchen, with closed doors and anxious faces. Corona took her pistol with a sprightly air, and stationed herself seven feet below the steps, at whose least and low-

est knot-hole she took her faltering aim. As she crouches there in the keen salt air and direct September sun, prone upon the genial rock, she feels a long warm wave creep and wash over her feet, and the clinging flannel dress, so used to the waves now that, like sea-weeds or sea-pebbles, it never looks so well as when under water. Corona no more thinks of changing her wet clothes at Fairharbor than would Zero or the lobsters. An indescribable touch of freedom overtakes her with the sense of the waves. She is exhilarated with the rude, crude life that she has chosen; combining (like the model boarding-house) all the luxuries of liberty with all the "comforts of a home." She is intoxicated with the nature of an existence in which to lie in the sun on a rock and shoot a pistol badly shall be the excitement of an hour and the event of a day. Indeed, she thinks so much about it that she quite forgets to shoot; and Mary puts her head out of the kitchen window, cautiously, to remind her that it is rather warm—three people, a dog, a cook-stove, and ironing-day—in a 9x8 kitchen; and has she shot herself? Or does she want the darning-needle, to reload with?

Thus recalled to duty, Corona on the rock pulls her reluctant trigger and aims at Paradise. There is smoke — explosion — then that most awful of human sounds, a cry following a shot.

Paradise seems to shudder and rock to its A No. 1 cedar posts. With that hideous momentary sense of *goneness* for which no security ever atones in this world of evil chances, Corona plunges over the cliff, and up the steps, and in.

"Is it Mary? Puelvir? Is it— Oh! Who?"

In the kitchen confusion reigns. It is Matthew Launcelot. It is Matthew Launcelot, tied to the ironing-table. It is Matthew Launcelot, uttering howls than which Cerberus could no worse, and spinning around the table-leg against an uncertain background of falling flat-irons and clean starched clothes.

"Oh! have I killed him?"

"Killed him!" cries Puella. "No such luck. He heard them shots, and thought it was the Raspberry Man. That's all. He upset all your night-gownds and Miss Mary's flounced petticoats, and then sot on a hot flat-iron, and stood and yelled. Killed him! No. I wish you had."

And silence reigns in that kitchen for a limited space of time. Zero, however, relieves the general awkwardness by proposing that they go and find how near Miss Corona hit her target. So he and the two ladies go out again into the sunny air, from which the murderous smoke is faintly settling away.

"Think of killing a man — a live man!" observes Mary.

But Corona cannot answer this original remark. Into her wild mood of a moment since, the dull human sense of limitation has pressed and come, insisting. One is not free, then, it seems, to fire at one's own house in this crowded world. And does not an emotion of pain outweigh a lifetime of pleasure?

But the ball, meanwhile, is nowhere to be found. Zero searches very conscientiously. He does not smile. Past the knot on the lowest step; past the step; up another; up the flight; over the threshold, fifteen feet above the level of the aim, a small, swift, cruel black mark lurks behind the front door. Zero goes in and picks up the ball from under the parlor stove. He says:—

"Here it is, Miss Corona. I said I'd resk it."

After this observation, Corona cleans her pistol in silence; Puella "does over" the spoiled petticoats; Matthew Launcelot is untied, to go fishing with the cat; Mary wanders with a novel, which she will not read; Zero plugs up the bullet-hole with putty; the morning warms, and the waves lean low, and a gentle apathy settles upon Paradise.

Perhaps it is owing (so unconscious are

we of our subtlest emotions) to her prevailing sense of humiliation, that Corona undertakes to-day to "improve" the boy Zero. She calls him to the red rock presently, where she and Mary are tired discussing whether Deronda should have married Gwendolen. Mary has brought the conversation to an abrupt termination by the unprecedented suggestion that Gwendolen would n't have had him. She reverenced him too much to risk losing her ideal in a fact, her priest in her husband.

Zero comes, in answer to the lady's call. He stands upon the red rock; he wears brown overalls and a green-check cotton waist or blouse sewed into a belt—the masculine uniform of Fairharbor; he calls it a "jumper." He is filliping gray and golden snail-shells into the water, previously removing the snail. Mary turns her back upon this entertaining occupation; but Corona is used to it.

"Zero," begins Corona, "do you really believe in the sea-serpent?"

"'D be a fool'f I didn't," replies Zero, succinctly. "Grandfather see him."

"Oh! Your grandfather?"

He was the first to see him. "Yes. discovered him jest off your rock. He was a boy, not so old as me, 'n him and another boy was lookin' for driftwood; and says Grandfather: 'There's a spar!' So they went and pitched right into the old chap, lickety-cut, like he'd ben a spar, to spear him in. I don't suppose he liked it much. He wriggled and cleared. He stayed in the Harbor a good spell. Folks tried to shoot him. They could n't hit him," added Zero, slowly; but, seeming to feel that he was trenching upon delicate ground, hastened to continue: "He was seventy feet long, with a head like a hoss's. There was thirty depo-si-tions," said Zero, pausing over the unaccustomed syllables, "to the sea-serpent. It's down in a book. It's down in the history of Fairharbor. Mother's got the book. I'll lend it to you. Father used to read it a sight. Mother's going Down East to stay a spell; she's so beat out since father died."

- "She must write to me while she's gone," suggests Corona, gently. "I hope you are a great comfort to your mother, Zero."
 - " Ma'am ?"
- "I hope you are a comfort to your poor mother."
- "I have a sight of errants to run for the boarders," replies Zero, reflectively.
- "What are you going to be?" continues Corona, with a brisk, inspiring air.
 - "Ma'am?"
 - "Be! What will you be, Zero?"
 - "Dunno."
- "Have you never thought? Have you no plans, Zero?"
- "Guess I shall jest stay round," says Zero, looking puzzled. "The other fellers do."
- "I hope you were not one of the 'fellers' who hooted and howled so at Matthew Launcelot, the other day, when I took him to the post-office," observes Mary, rather primly. "They were not polite."

"The boys of the sea-shore have been celebrated for their lack of repose in manner ever since the days of Homer," replies Corona. "You'll find them hooting and howling just so in the Iliad—or the Odyssey—it doesn't matter. Tom told me. Come, Zero, tell us. Don't you feel any ambition to learn a trade or—anything? It is a wretched life the boys live in Fairharbor, learning principally how to get drunk or drowned!" adds Corona, with some excitement.

She looks at Zero's incurious, quiet face, with the home-clinging in the eyes that she has learned to read so well—a fatal look. It would never let him go where he could not get back to Fairharbor at night, if he could help it. She feels sorry for the little fellow; the more so when he replies, with a certain dull dignity:—

- "I never got drunk."
- "I know some boarder boys call us dockrats," adds Zero, after a pause.
- "That is impolite, too; that is very impolite."

- "So I told 'em. It did n't make any odds. They 'll go away pretty soon. I went away last week. I went to Dove's Cote. I was glad to get back. I guess if I should go to Boston I should be homesick. I'm used to fishes," adds Zero, thoughtfully.
 - "Do you go to school, Zero?" asks Mary.
 - "Winters."
 - "To church?"
 - "Baptis'. We're mostly Baptises here."
- "If I lend you some books, Zero, to read this winter, should you like them?"
- "Guess I shall go haddockin' this winter. Somebody's got to, now father can't."
- "You're a little fellow to go haddocking in the winter."
- "I'm eleven. I know a chap went when he was eight. He got drownded."
- "Now, if anybody helped you, would you rather not be anything but a fisherman?"
- "My father was a fisherman," replies Zero, with that same dull dignity.
- "So was St. John," suggests Corona, in a low voice.

"Besides," adds Zero, returning obstinately to his first proposition, "I'm used to fishes."

"Will you write to Mother when she's Down East, as you said?" asks Zero, presently, looking over his shoulder to snap the last orange snail into the rising tide. "She's so beat out. She can't lift the dishwater. I have to heave it away for her myself. I guess she'll write to you, if you want her to. I'm afraid she may be homesick. She ain't used to Down East."

Corona watches the boy silently as he lounges away. He seems to her as truly a sea creature as the snail he has left floating on the tide at her feet; a soul grown into a shell.

And Mary, leaning over to look into a little pool in the rock where a star-fish has got trapped, and lies palpitating and purple beneath a bit of broad green weed, with a barnacle or two and a bead of brown kelp, wonders idly if Deronda would have set Gwendolen to anything of this sort when

he talked to her about "the religious life." To Deronda, religion meant Jews. Mary remembers that to somebody it must mean boys.

But Mrs. Rowin, going Down East, writes to Corona, as she has promised. She says Zero is a good boy, and she never heard him swear. She says she sends him to the Sunday-school. She says they are so poor he must go haddocking this winter. She speaks of his father and of their affliction. She spells "Husband," poor soul! with a capital, and "god" with a little g.

XI.

THE SERPENT.

THERE was never an Eden without him. And he had come. I wish it distinctly understood that I do not mean the sea-serpent. Nobody could be missed with more heartiness and less reserve than Elf; yet since she had gone, and Mary and Corona had resumed their placid tête-à-tête in Paradise, they were very happy. At least, Corona thought they were.

One soft September morning she came home from the post-office, and found a brown young man in her gray parlor. He was very brown, having been, as Mary hastened to explain, yachting on the Maine coast all summer, and now, on his return home to Brooklyn, thought he would stop over a train or so at Fairharbor.

curred to Corona that Fairharbor was not immediately upon the route between Maine and Brooklyn; but she made no remarks to this effect. Mary wore her white flannel sea-dress, and a sensitive flush upon either cheek. She begged Corona to stay and hear Mr. Sinuous's account of the chowder he got at Mt. Desert.

"Yes," said Mr. Sinuous. "We call it cod-tea down there."

Corona, having treated the subject of chowder in every form which presented itself to her imagination, until aware that she was exhausting it by an air-pump of double pressure, left Mary and the Serpent together, and wandered thoughtfully out upon the rocks.

Puelvir saw her, and put her head through the kitchen window.

"Goin' to keep him for dinner, Miss Corona?"

"Yes, Puelvir."

"We hain't got nothin' but hash and tomaytoes."

- "Never mind, Puelvir."
- "I s'pose I could stir up a puddin', if it was n't ironin'."
 - "Very well, Puelvir."

Puelvir hesitated before resuming: -

- "Brother of her'n?"
- "Oh! no."
- "Any relation?"
- "I believe not, Puelvir."
- "Hm-m. M-m-m," said Puelvir.
- "I think," said Corona, severely, "you had better make the pudding, Puelvir."
- "I'll leave something out, if you say so," replied Puelvir. "I'll leave out something and spoil it, so he won't want to come again."

The Serpent stayed to dinner. Despite Puelvir's noble intentions as to her pudding, he stayed to tea. He expressed himself so much pleased with Fairharbor (and the pudding) that he thought he should spend a few days at the hotel. Corona, with the soul of sweetness in her smile and the ashes of bitterness in her heart, replied that she

hoped he would. But Mary did not reply at all.

Mr. Sinuous came to tea also the following day, having arranged to take the ladies sailing. Puelvir put on turned preserves, and let her biscuit fall. But Mr. Sinuous, nothing daunted, came to breakfast next morning. It was a disappointment to Puelvir that the pop-overs were light as silver clouds.

Only one lady went sailing that day. The other sat at home alone.

It was that evening and quite late, when, having bidden the brown young man goodnight upon the piazza, in the dim half-light that fell out from the little silent house, Mary came to Corona's room, and began at once:—

"I have exiled you, dear—driven up here alone. It is too bad. Come down. I want to talk with you. I think—I believe I must go home next week. You know I meant to go week after. It won't make much difference—such a little while."

She put out her hand like a child who deprecates a scolding. Corona took it in silence, and in silence the two groped down the steep, dark cottage stairs.

A shimmer of many colors filled the parlor and dining-room, falling from the Japanese shades and tinted candles with which Corona loved to make her evening gay. Mary, in her white dress, stood among these broken lights, resplendent. Her cheeks were burning; but her eyes were soft and clear.

"Mother will be expecting me," she began, hesitating. "And—it's a long journey to Brooklyn—to take alone. Mr. Sinuous has got to go next week. He thought it would be pleasanter for me to have company. I"—

Mary stopped; but Corona said: —

- "I have only one thing to say, Mollie. You might have told me before, I think."
- "But, Corona, I had n't anything to tell till now," cried Mary, lifting her head.
- "We were pretty old friends," returned Corona, slowly.

"If there's anything I hate," continued Mary, "it is women who talk about such things beforehand."

"Kiss me, Mary," said Corona. "You are right."

"If you'd asked me last week," proceeded Mary, "I should have told you I never meant to be married. Never. Why, Co, I thought he was flirting with Net Sibley, down at Mt. Desert, this summer long. I did, indeed!"

Those last few flushed September days passed swiftly. Corona, indeed, was not sorry when they were over. She had lost Mary. It was as well to lose the Serpent too.

Yet she felt a certain proud pleasure in it all, as she sat alone so many hours, turned out of her parlor, her piazza, off from her bowlder and her shadow on the afternoon side of the house. She was glad to have happier eyes than hers watch the clovers grow under the cottage. And the clovers were brown now, too. She was glad to have

lovers in her house—once, at least, and this first summer. It seemed to her just the baptism that her home had lacked. It was no longer a pale and solitary thing. It was henceforth linked to all humanity. It had experience and memories.

She said "God bless you!" when Mary went away; but nothing more. She could not talk. And Mary went from Corona's Eden to her own, leaning on the Serpent's arm.

Matthew Launcelot, who had cordially disapproved of the Serpent from the outset, and had made no secret of his prejudice, stationed himself upon the big bowlder, and howled savagely at the omnibus till it was out of sight, when, in the violence of his emotions at having nothing left to bark at, he tumbled off the rock, and sprained his ankle; which Puelvir bound up, with the ambiguous remark that she wished it had been his'n. Would n't she have bandaged it in red pepper or something scalt!

It was not long after Mary's departure

that Corona had a very restless night. Possibly it was owing to the sense of renewed solitude, which sat like an uninvited guest within her silent rooms; but Paradise seemed to her strained ears to be beset by strange, uncanny sounds. She bade Puelvir double lock the doors, and herself bolted the parlor windows four several times apiece. She kept a light burning on the stairs, and noticed where the carving-knife was left, and brought up the dinner-bell where it would be available, and cocked her Smith & Wesson, which lay upon the blue table by the blue bed. She slept with difficulty, waking often.

A great many things happened to disturb her. First cats. Then the tide. After that, the wind. Cats again. The fog-horn; breakers; a party at the hotel. More cats. Then a mouse (the first one) got into the new house, and nibbled somewhere very neatly. Then there was a creak in the blinds; a squeak in the window; horses in a barn; people on the beach; semi-distant dogs; mosquitoes; and another cat. A while after this came a variety. Something breathed beneath her window.

Corona spent some time over this form of midnight amusement, leaning anxious and idiotic over the sill, uncertain whether to ring the pistol, sharpen the dinner-bell, or fire the carving-knife, and naively taking comfort in the fact that Matthew Launcelot slept like the useful dead, and was not at all disturbed by the emergency. When, at last, she had discovered that the house was surrounded by those picturesque cattle from the hill pasture; and when she and Puelvir had set forth, attired in a wrapper and a lantern, and waded rheumatically about in their rubber boots through the long, dewladen grass, to drive the intruders off; when the horses had baulked at them, and the cows had hooked at them, and the whole "effect" becoming obstinate, Corona had, at length, driven the entire drove at the point of her carving-knife into the cornfield, and left them there; when the two women, feeling cold, and lame, and silly, and sleepless, and of none too sweet a temper, had really fallen into the heavy rest which overtakes a disturbed, escaping night—it was then that there sharply fell upon their dreaming ears, unmistakable and unmerciful, the low accents of a human voice,

Corona grasped her pistol with curdling blood. Puelvir ran in. Matthew Launcelot awaked with an evident consciousness of having been the first to warn the household, and, with an extreme air of masculine superiority, howled thunderously between the two women and the windows. Every hair on Matthew's tiny head and shoulders seemed to say: "Don't fear, my dears. I am here."

"It is very singular," said Corona; "but the sound does n't stop. Listen, Puelvir! The more the dog yaps, the more noise the man makes. It must be some lunatic, I fear, Puelvir, or a drunken sailor. Hark! He makes the worse noise of the two."

"Well, I don't know about that," said

Puelvir, with some show of feeling, which struck her mistress at the moment as more or less misplaced.

"I'm going to shoot," said Corona, trembling very much. She placed her shining Smith & Wesson, with a shudder, on the sill. Matthew Launcelot put his cold, inquiring nose upon the trigger; then, not being satisfied, smelt of the muzzle with a scientific manner. Puelvir drew in her mistress' hand, with a sharp exclamation:

"You'll kill the dog! Not to say nothin' of him! Put up that pistol, Miss Corona, do, and get to bed. Two women-folks here in their night-gownds! Whatever will he think of us!"

"Think of us! He!" cried Corona, in dismay. "Puelvir, I insist upon an explanation. If you're in league with a band of burglars to murder me, I request that you say so at once, Puelvir. The dinnerbell is left. I can rouse the neighbors. I can"—

"Oh! there," interrupted Puelvir, "don't.

I'm sorry you're so scart; but I guess it's only a serenade. I would n't shoot, if I was you. Hush! Don't you hear? He's singin' 'In the Sweet.' It's a nice thing for a serenade, I think. Don't you? 'In the Sweet.'"

In truth, as Puelvir spoke, the mournful melody of the "Sweet By and By," sung by a more or less accidentally bass voice, lacerated the midnight air.

"I know no one," replied Corona, severely, and still unrelieved. "No one would sing the 'Sweet By and By' to serenade me."

"Land, ma'am," said Puelvir, "I did n't say it was you."

For one swift moment there in the dark, the blushes of a not unbeautiful pride common to her sex under certain circumstances mantled Puelvir's gaunt cheek. Puelvir was a woman. She felt just then that she was superior to her mistress, who had no serenades.

"I think," added Puelvir, more meekly, "it must be the Raspberry Man. He said he should; but I did n't expect him to-

night. He said I'd know him by 'In the Sweet.' I'll get some close on, and go an' tell him he is botherin' us. You jest go to bed. I'll manage him."

"I would n't hurt his feelings," said Corona, more gently too, but with a nameless terror at her heart.

"His feelin's!" replied Puelvir, scornfully, as she went out of the room, followed expressively by Matthew Launcelot, breathing vengeance.

All that passed between Puelvir and her serenader is not known to the compiler of this record. But certain it is that, after a brief consultation (very much assisted in intensity by Matthew Launcelot) between the back doorstep and the maroon-and-indigo curtains, the sounds of "In the Sweet" died away, and the departing footsteps of the Raspberry Man left Paradise to silence, to safety, and to sleep.

But Corona lay long with her wakeful eyes fixed upon the headlights of the anchored ships, and on the stars above the Bay. It seemed to her that the stars were falling, and that the lights were dim. Among the more harrowing afflictions of this uncertain life, where shall we find one striking deeper roots into the soul than the prospect, especially the *first* prospect of having your cook get married?

"It is of no use," thought Corona, with a bitterness which only a novice both at life and at householding can remember how to understand. "I agree with the great man who, dying, said that life was all a mistake, and never worth the candle. The world is not made for solitary people. It is of no use to be an old maid, unless other persons will be old maids too. There ought to be a law made forbidding a woman to marry after she is thirty-five."

But in the morning, when she came down, looking rather pale, Puelvir watched her scrutinizingly, and said: "Beef-tea?"

"Thank you, Puelvir. I'm not sick."

"A mite of cocoa, or cream to your oatmeal? Or would you rather I'd scrambled

the eggs? You looked peaked. Mebbe a little raspberry vin"—

But the word raspberry had such overwhelming associations for both mistress and maid that Puelvir stopped.

"I hope," began Corona, "that you will be happy, Puelvir, if you ever should find it necessary to leave me; but"—

"Land!" said Puelvir. "Is that it? Land!"

Puelvir was silent for some moments. Her emotions seemed too intense to permit of calm or connected speech. After a time she came round in front of her mistress, standing with the water-pitcher abstractedly held at arm's length, and performing as she spoke a series of gymnastic exercises with it, as if it were dumb-bells, and said, with great vigor:—

"I should wish to tell you, Miss Corona, I ain't a deef-and-dumb gone fool yit. No knowin' what I'll come to fore I'm under ground. Nobody knows. It is with menfolks and women-folks as it is with measless

or the mumps. Nobody knows when they 'll catch it. It ain't safe for nobody to say nothin' about an affliction that the Lord as made us sees fit, in his mysterious providence, to send upon us when least we looks for it. May his will be done!"

Too free a use of the instinct of gesture set the contents of the water-pitcher into active ebullition over Corona's fresh morning-dress; but Puelvir was too much in earnest and her mistress too much relieved to notice the little dabs and splashes, cascades and rills that emphasized Puelvir's punctuation. What was a spoiled cambric against a Paradise Preserved?

"So far's he's in count," continued Puelvir, "I settled him last night."

"Last night!" cried Corona, touched, despite herself, by the inhumanity of this unexpected proceeding. "When he had come — so far — to serenade you, Puelvir?"

"Land! yes," proceeded Puelvir. "I set behind the curtain, the indigo one, and he didn't see me; though I did have my blanket shawl on over my night-gownd, if he had. So 's it was proper enough, for the matter of that. You need n't worry. I don't see 's the serenade made the odds. If he 'd only sang 'In the Sweet,' and gone off pacified, I should have thought more on him. I'm partial to music, especially by the water. But seein' he had to up and perpose — under them circumstances — I told him I'd signed a contract to do for you for ten years."

"Puelvir!"

"Well, I did. I don't call that anything out the way. A woman has to make up something to pacify a man. They'd never swaller the truth. Land! Did you ever see a man that would believe it if a woman told him it was him she did n't want? Besides, I knew he would n't think of offerin' to wait ten years. I thought I'd put it high. He's a widderer, with seven children, mostly small. I knew he could n't wait, so I said you would n't let me off."

"I said I was sorry," added Puelvir, in &

polite tone, with a generous flourish of the pitcher, that sent the water gurgling unreproved down Corona's happy neck. "And I advised him to go hunt up a girl I'd heard of down to the Point, that's partial to widderers—been promised to two already. He said he'd think of it. But he said," continued Puelvir, "his feelings would compel him not to do business this way at present, and the butcher hain't only onions. It'll make it bad about berries for a spell."

XII.

THE FLAMING SWORD.

SEPTEMBER lingers fondly about the Old Maid's Paradise. Watching its departure is like watching the parting between friends whose feeling for one another partakes somewhat of the nature of love, while yet retaining the finer essence and calmer poise of friendship. September lingers; but he must be gone. So, too, must the chance guests whom the dwellers by the sea receive and lose in these thoughtful days. Outside in the wide world, fall sewing and October coupons beckon alike imperiously. There are children brown from the beaches, to be turned white in school. There are flirtations broken off at Conway, to be renewed in Boston. And if one belongs to a Club for the Comparison of Coptic and Arizonian Metres, it is time to hasten home and prepare the essay for the opening session. Or if one is president of the Society for the Encouragement of Beggars, one must draw up the schedule for the winter's work. The world, in fact, is busy. It can row and sail, it can climb and stroll, it can sleep and sing, it can swim and rest, it can drift and dream no more.

But down here at Fairharbor there is no world to molest or to make afraid. Summer tarries, and the low east wind, like a mature and charming woman, is both sweet and strong. The water is clear, windswept, and wonderful. The tide beats full and high, like the pulse of that apparently abounding health that sometimes precedes a sudden onset of disease. But disease. death, decay — what mean they? thinks of the words now with an idle skepticism. We will bask and bathe in the sun upon the warm red rocks, while straight the ozone beats into our faces from the almighty sea.

And now Corona closely treasures every expression that flits across the forehead of the Harbor and the engirdling shore. Yesterday the wave was brown, purple to-day; gray now, and gold within an hour. This morning the leaves of the nasturtium on the piazza curled and dropped. Monday the field was green and kindly yet. To-day the last wild rose burns on the bowlder, and Puelvir brings it from the thicket where it hid. It is a tiny blossom, deepening in color, feverish with its late life, and delicate as a distant rose-red star.

One day — it seems not an hour after — Corona wakes and looks abroad, and says:

"Oh! the golden-rod has come."

"Be'n here weeks," says Puelvir.

But Corona repeats, dreamily, —

"The golden-rod is here!"

And she has never seen it; never with the soul's eyes. Now and then, it may be, strolling up from the surf, or straying to find yellow snail-shells in the hot noon till the bathing-dress is dry, she has been aware of a color like spilled gold coin in the clefts and crevices of the rocks, and idly said: "Oh! golden-rod." But never till this moment: "The golden-rod is here."

"For Kilmeny had been she knew not where,
And Kilmeny had seen what she could not declare."

Now as the leafer covers the pinered leaf

Now, as she looks across the ripened land, an unseen hand has struck and changed its complexion. It is like looking at the same scene through glass of differing tints. Now, indeed, the wild briar and the rose blush have vanished; the little asters hide, pale and purple, in shy places; but the autumn dandelions stand in confident groups, and the golden-rod is an army, plumed and proud. The shore glitters beneath the flowers, and the sea beneath the sun.

Corona steps out slowly, and breaks a spray of the sad, significant thing. It has a swift curve and a dazzling glare. She holds it for an instant with fingers that tremble a little, flings it down, and turns away. She has seen the Sword of Flame. After Paradise comes exile.

"Don't you think," says Puelvir, coming out and picking up the golden-rod, "I'd better have Zero boosted up into that loft, to clear it out, before long? If you should get lonesome and want to go sudden, the house had oughter be left slick. He's light. He'll boost easy."

And now, when Corona comes in dreamy and flushed from the beach or the bay, the rock, or the town, or returns from a look at Father Morrison, or Jane Thurston, or poor little Mrs. Rowin, every vein pulsing with kinship to the sea people and every nerve tenacious with tenderness for the sea, she finds Paradise in strange distortion. Usually Zero, extinguished as to the head and shoulders and very sprawly as to the legs and feet, hangs mysteriously from the loft (which grows out of Puelvir's ceiling), mainly engaged, it seems, in throwing things upon the floor, for Puelvir to pick up and put back again. Failing this, he is found, to Matthew Launcelot's vociferous disapproval, chopping codfish in the woodshed with a borrowed hatchet. Zero has a passion for this last occupation; in fact, it is one which he has originated, and which he considers especially helpful to the political economy of Miss Corona's household. He says, if she don't stay much longer, it would be a pity to buy a fresh salt-fish; and this one won't be so hard after it is soaked. While he speaks, Puelvir comes up and says she has n't got anything for dessert. It seems a pity to be doing up a lot of apple-sass now.

These intimations try Corona severely; the more as she has never yet expressed the most remote intention of leaving Paradise. Then, too, such scenes have a painful flavor of house-cleaning about them; and Corona has always declared, and is still ready to die for her faith, that if ever she had a house it should never be cleaned. She retreats from Zero and Puelvir, betakes herself and her displeasure to the "Gull's Wing," and rows hard for two long, glittering, ecstatic hours. The tide is coming in.

The Harbor is full. It seems to overflow with life, with vigor, and with the secret of existence, which it knows not how to keep. She puts up her oars and drifts in the shadow of the gray old town. She notes the familiar outline of each sea-beaten home, the pulse of every throbbing wave. "Every drop of water, every grain of sand" in the old place grows dear. Her heart, heavy with parting, cries out to Fairharbor:—

"I love thy rocks and rills!"

One day she proposes to Puelvir that they never leave at all; put clapboards and a furnace into Paradise, or, at least, a good base-burner and fifty-cent carpets, and stay all winter; adding, sadly,—

"I suppose you would n't be happy, Puelvir?"

But Puelvir says, with a loyal sniff, -

"An' what have I ever done, Miss Corona, that you should think I would n't stay by ye?"

On the strength of this devotion, Corona

writes to Mr. Timbers to inquire the cost of clapboards; but does not commit herself irrevocably as yet to a winter in Fairharbor. And the golden days glide on, and their evenings and their mornings pale. Now at dawn the open sea takes on a colder countenance. Now at the early sunset colors of steel and iron and of ice creep in. The winds are busy, and the peach-basket tumbles over with its load of wood beside the little grate in the little gray parlor every day. The "Gull's Wing" tosses feverishly at her moorings. It grows too wild to row.

The summer people melt from the boarding-houses like a late March snow, and the rocks are bare. The beach, too, is silent. Scarlet coats of little children tossing up white sand have vanished. The invalid lady lies no more upon the cliff, beneath the glowing shadow of her purple silk umbrella; and the Japanese parasol disappeared some time ago. The gossip has gone from the bowlder, where she used to sit and regale her companions (and Corona) with the full

particulars of her last quarrel with the landlady, who gave them no ice-cream on Sunday noons. On moonlit nights the young folks no longer pace the beach by twos. Even Zero goes to school.

One day Puelvir says that the ice-man thinks they 'll freeze stiddy enough without him now; and that the fish-man can't come no longer for one customer. In vain Corona suggests that one customer can starve as hard as twenty. The fish-man shakes his head, and is going into the coal and peat business next week. Would be happy to accommodate her. In vain Corona urgently inquires what other people do down here for fresh fish in winter. The fish-man tells her, after some thought (he is evidently surprised by the question), that he doesn't know; he guesses they eat it salt. And Corona replies, with dignity, that the lobster-man is left.

Daily it grows quiet in Fairharbor. It grows very quiet in Fairharbor. Corona and Puelvir live on lobsters and the scenery.

But the one is well worth the other for a little longer yet. Corona defers Mr. Timbers and the clapboards at present; but lingers reluctant still and loth. How shall she leave thee, Paradise? So solemn is the dying of the year upon this barren shore! So gentle will the Indian summer be, when yet the waves shall show their burning hearts, and the fisherman's children play once more in sun-bonnets upon the now cold, recoiling sand.

"If only we could all wait patiently," thinks Corona, "past the first frosts of our lives, until their Indian summers come!"

All these days Tom is writing begging letters; and Susy sends word that the baby will not know her when she comes. But Corona answers them that the sky is green to-day, or that the wave is royal purple, or that the tide is high; that she will pick cranberries with Jane Thurston, or stay to bid the Rowin boys good-by. They must take the terrible winter voyages now, since they left their father at the Banks. The

fewer to lose, the deeper the danger into which they must be sent. This is the mysterious law of life to the women of Fairharbor.

But by and by there comes a windy Sunday. It is a most memorable day. Puelvir goes to church, where she is spiritually benefited by learning that the Raspberry Man has married a widow with four, and that the minister asked an increase of his salary, on the ground that the price of fish in Fairharbor was higher than in any place in which he had labored.

But Corona stays at home, with her Bible, her Robertson, Matthew Launcelot, her open fire, and the wind. The silence of the cottage aches under the tumult without. The Harbor is gray and cold. Long lines and streaks of neutral shadow bar it off. The foam is scanty and flat, breaking chiefly on the western shore. Rings and crowns of light lie vibrating outside the blue-gray gravity of the channel. Toward the beach a subdued green of three distinct shades

blends in. This green is chilly, lightened with white, not yellow. Beds of brown weeds lie so abundantly and so softly at half-tide upon the sand that they seem to be shadows. The horizon throbs with sails. They all lean southeasterly. The wind is from the northward. The clouds are gray, with silver edges but watery centres; the horizon watery also, pale and bluish. The opposite shore is slightly hazy, as if seen through spray. The roof of one house only one - over there, catches the sun and shines sharply. One sail, too, a black one, glides along the opaque shadow of the western shore. Corona can hear the rustling of her nearest neighbor's trees; but the little trees out upon the Point, sheltered she knows not how or why, stand still. The grass and the autumn dandelions blow fiercely.

As the day advances, a purple, pinched look grows upon the lips of the waves that are nearest the beach. The gulls, the sand-pipers, and the swallows fly restlessly and

without apparent aim. The dandelions seem to brace themselves against the full force of the wind. Sickened leaves hang from the flowerless rose-bushes. The St. Johnswort and yarrow have faded; but the nasturtiums burn on.

Toward evening the tide grows extremely low, beaten out by the fierce wind, which rises steadily to a gale. Shells and weeds are thrown up profusely. It is impossible to walk upon the beach. All over the horizon the driven sails are turning in. They will soon be home.

The evening falls, and the tempest of the night sets in. The two women feel small and unsheltered in the sturdy, trembling little house. Puelvir draws the curtains and struggles with the fire. She says nothing; but she thinks it rather lonesome in Paradise to-night. Perhaps Puelvir's imagination has been touched slightly by the sight of the widow with four. She betakes herself to her room, draws her maroon-andindigo curtains, and writes to a cousin,

whom she has not thought of twice this summer. She wishes she had a sister to write to, or "some folks." She thinks it very windy out to-night.

Corona sits a long time silent by the fire, watching the tender struggle between the light and shade upon her soft gray walls, listening to the fiercer battle of the seasons out upon the sea. She thinks: It will still be there. Death, change, denial touch us all; sun and frost will burn and freeze; the wind raves and the calm comes; but the sea is there.

And, with a sigh, she reaches for her pen and slowly writes:—

DEAR TOM: — It will take a week to board up Paradise. Expect me Saturday, at seven.

Co.

Matthew Launcelot comes up inquiringly, rather than inquisitively (Matthew never yields to the lesser motive), and puts his nose, cool as the deprecation of hesitation or regret, upon the paper. But what she

has written she has written. And Tom's face comes before her with a sudden passion of longing as she sits alone. She kisses Matthew Launcelot; but she says "Dear Tom." For Paradise, like the Kingdom of Heaven, is within us, after all.

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